

## Macalester College DigitalCommons@Macalester College

---

Political Science Honors Projects

Political Science Department

---

2017

# The Bull's Hide Stretched Thin: Catalan (Literary) Nationalism from the Renaixenca to the Death of Franco

Seaver Holter

Macalester College, [sholter@macalester.edu](mailto:sholter@macalester.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/poli\\_honors](http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/poli_honors)



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Holter, Seaver, "The Bull's Hide Stretched Thin: Catalan (Literary) Nationalism from the Renaixenca to the Death of Franco" (2017). *Political Science Honors Projects*. 62.  
[http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/poli\\_honors/62](http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/poli_honors/62)

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science Department at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

The Bull's Hide Stretched Thin:  
Catalan (Literary) Nationalism from the *Renaixença* to the Death of Franco

Seaver J. Holter

Advisor: Professor David L. Blaney  
Political Science  
26 April, 2017

**Abstract**

Spain's "Catalan question" threatens the unity of the central state. To better understand the nature of contemporary nationalist sentiment in Catalonia, I undertake a study of the movement's cultural roots. It is my view that the development of Catalan nationalism is attributable to the prevalence of nineteenth-century Romantic conceptions of national identity as being inextricably linked to language, the essential vehicle of *Volksgeist*. This development of a Catalan literary canon was linked to the survival of the Catalan national spirit in the face of Castilian repression, despite the little political unity within Catalonia itself. Paradoxically, it is also through literature that Catalan intellectuals made a critique of Spain and Catalonia, as much to broaden the inclusivity of the political community as to re-conceptualize the connection between language and nation. Ultimately, I argue that the nation—far from a natural or indisputable form, though one with material effects—is "imagined" (and unimagined or deconstructed) by writing fiction.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Professor David Blaney, who has been an invaluable mentor, advisor, and guide since my first semester at Macalester. I also thank my readers, Professors Toni Dorca and Nadya Nedelsky, for their insightful commentary and willingness to read my work. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for helping me grow not only as an intellectual but also as a brother, son, and friend.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Preface.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Chapter I.....	14
Chapter II .....	26
Chapter III.....	46
Chapter IV.....	55
Chapter V .....	65
Conclusion .....	92
Works Cited .....	97

## Preface

This project arose from my peregrinations in Barcelona. In my mind, I walked around the entire city, the only real destination being the many bookstores—both first- and second-hand—that populate its streets. Fascinated by the written and spoken word, I filled much of my time abroad in Madrid with these minor pilgrimages, studying the shelves of Spanish-language fiction and poetry with the intent of familiarizing myself with as many titles as possible, if not actually buying any books (scholastic poverty makes difficult buying anything besides cheap food). But being in Barcelona's multilingual bookstores started the thinking that motivated this project. I wanted to know how it was possible for a small nation such as Catalonia to have such a seemingly powerful publishing industry, featuring original titles and many translated works all published in Catalan, when in comparison other nations with minority languages such as France could hardly keep these languages from going extinct. How did Catalan not only survive but also become more than just a peripheral language? I was impressed and resolved to return to Barcelona as soon as possible.

I did so the summer after my semester in Madrid ended, with the help of a grant from the Macalester Political Science Department. Being alone in Catalonia was ideal, as my solitude pushed me to engage in long conversations with the strangers I met in cafes, on trains, or in bookstores. I began asking the Catalans I met about their views on the nationalist movement and whether it had anything to do with language, as I perceived. Álvaro, a kind, conspiratorial businessman I sat with in a crowded café in Barcelona, explained his own relationship to the politics of Catalonia and the Catalan language. “Es mi lengua materna,” he said in Spanish though referring to Catalan. He expressed the

sentiment that he would perhaps feel differently about his native city were he to speak primarily Spanish. “Pero yo no soy nacionalista,” he was quick to add. He then echoed what several other Catalan-speakers I met theorized: that the phenomenon of nationalism (and in some cases independentism) in Catalonia seemed to be the domain of either the “bourgeoisie” or the upper classes. Quim, an elderly nurse with *Doctors Without Borders*, gave me his Marxist take on the movement: “Soy obrero, trabajo con mis manos, así que no puedo aceptar como legítimo ningún movimiento que no tiene nada que ver con los derechos de los obreros en Cataluña, aunque este movimiento y los obreros ambos sean catalanes.”<sup>1</sup> These conversations as well as my travels provoked me to think about Catalonia’s difference from Spain as a whole, particularly with respect to the difference in language, and the nature of a movement that reasserted this difference perhaps for reasons other than the ostensible one of liberating Catalan culture and identity through self-determination.

---

<sup>1</sup> “I’m a laborer, and I work with my hands. I can’t accept any movement as legitimate that doesn’t have anything to do with the rights of workers, even though this movement and the workers both are Catalan.”

## Introduction

It was the Greek historian Strabo who compared the Iberian Peninsula to a bull's hide; given the current tug of war between Spain's several nationalist poles of power, it's not controversial to say that this bull's hide is being stretched thin, threatening the dissolution (or at the least the weakening) of the central state (Viestenz, Bull 259). One need only reflect on Catalonia's recent history to see these tensions between strong regional identity and allegiance to a central state. Take, for example, former President of the Generalitat of Catalonia Artur Mas's ratification in 2014 of a referendum that would ask not only "do you want Catalonia to be a state," but also if so, "do you want Catalonia to be an independent state?" ("Catalonia President"). Though roughly 80% of voters on the referendum answered yes to both questions, the referendum had relatively low turnout of 37% (Perez). Then again in September of 2015, during the elections for Catalonia's autonomous parliament, a majority of voters expressed the desire to see their nation form a state independent from Spain but with the "independentist" coalition gaining only a slight plurality (some 48%) of the vote. The issue of Catalonia's self-determination continues to loom large, as current President of the Generalitat Carles Puigdemont has proposed a legally binding plebiscite on independence to be held in September of 2017. The force of nationalist sentiment and popular support of independence threaten the unity of a centralist Spain. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, whose declaration that the constitutional court of Spain would rule unconstitutional any move to secede from the central state, certainly believes as much.

After the referendum for self-determination, probably the most internationally famous of the tensions between the central Spanish state and the autonomous government



of Catalonia is the 2010 ban on bullfighting issued by the *Generalitat*, Catalonia's autonomous political organ. Although the purported reasons for banning *tauromaquia* in Catalonia is the sport's cruelty and perceived barbarism, some commentators both within and out of Catalonia were quick to highlight the implicit assertion of cultural difference and perhaps even feeling of superiority in the decision. Jesús Mosterín, for instance, implied in his article "El principio del fin" that the ban is a form of cultural separation from Spain, a culturally backwards, unenlightened nation clinging to savage and maybe fetishistic rituals, as opposed to a more progressive, modern Catalonia. William Viestenz has also written that, in a certain sense, the ban on bullfighting in Catalonia signals the rejection of a "Spanish" machismo alleged to be no longer valid or extant in Catalonia. Whatever the case, the central Spanish government in recent years has pushed back against this act of cultural separation, as in 2016 "Spain's constitutional court" ruled that "the preservation of common cultural heritage' was the responsibility of the state and the Catalan parliament had exceeded its authority" (Burgen). In Viestenz's estimation, this is indeed an attempt by the Spanish central state to reassert the Spanishness of Catalonia and strip the nation of its ability to culturally determine itself (Sins of the Flesh).

If this is the current situation in the Iberian Peninsula<sup>2</sup>, what then are the origins of the political and cultural struggle between the two poles of Madrid and Barcelona? How did this powerfully political sense of Catalan identity come to displace or preclude the ideological power of the Spanish state in Catalonia? If it is true (or plausible) that a Catalan bourgeoisie is to blame (or to be praised, depending on your vantage) for this

---

<sup>2</sup> And there are other comparable regional tensions, such as between Basque nationalists and the central state.

surge in the feeling of national difference, what are the methods by which nationalist sentiment was effected in Catalonia? What the preceding reflection is not meant to assert is that every act of the Catalan autonomous government must necessarily be the product of a bourgeois conspiracy designed to take power from the central state all the while enriching itself. But rather, the “independence referendum” and the bullfighting ban are indicative of a cultural division that carries serious political and economic consequences, a division whose manipulation in the hands of various political actors within and outside of the region will have implications for those living in the region for years to come. It is thus necessary to explore the political and cultural undercurrents that have led up to the present in order to better make sense of how difference is often manipulated and controlled, rather than the natural result of history imagined as a succession of material circumstances building one upon the other in logical and irrefutable progression.

Throughout this paper I gently employ the theory of Benedict Anderson to frame the case of Catalan nationalism, particularly one of its variants, *bourgeois* nationalism or nationalism with bourgeois values. The title of Anderson’s most important text, *Imagined Communities*, hints at the content of the theory. In Anderson’s estimation, nations arise from the same impulse that provokes religious sentiment and organization: the necessity of transforming “fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” (Anderson 11). Similarly, one of the key characteristics of nationalism is the belief held by nationalists that their particular nation has existed since “time immemorial” as a fixed, divinely sanctioned entity (Anderson 11). The cultural component enters into Anderson’s equation, then, as the necessary preexisting structure or substratum that gives various nationalisms substance and content. For many Spanish persons, Spain would be an

unthinkable entity without the work of Miguel de Cervantes and the *Quijote*, which seems to express truths unique to an essentially Spanish character. It is the same with the Catalans and Ramón Llull or Ausiàs March or even Mercè Rodoreda. In short, in its most reducible form, the cultural basis of nationalism, as we will see, is language, the possessors of a common tongue that compose a nation being “entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals” (Anderson 84).

Nevertheless, because political and material power affect the ways the community is imagined, the myths and representations that are generated by a particular nation are charged with depths of meaning that may serve either to shore up the power of the political elite or to change the “essential” character of the nation. Thus, despite the idea of the nation as a horizontal fraternity of equals all possessing the same language and consequently being conjoined in the “unisonance” of the nation, rarely does an individual nation make good on the principle of horizontal solidarity for all (Anderson 145). The particular development of the individual nation must be studied to understand the modalities of democracy within the political boundaries of a given imagined community. In the Catalan case, we will see that the birth of the nation is linked to modernization and industrialization, which in turn was made possible by the transformation of an agrarian peasantry into an urban bourgeoisie. We will see that this transformation is dramatized in the national consciousness as represented by literature, a feature of the modern nation that is particularly important both to Anderson’s theory and to the imagining of the nation itself. For without a market for printed media in its various forms (i.e., the novel, poetry, newspapers, etc.), the individual members of a given nation have no conceivable way of imagining their relationships to one another. I use the literary history of Catalonia,

subject to the vagaries of centuries of Spanish political dominance, as not merely a mirror that reflects a given society at a given time in history but rather as a force that is used to do the necessary imagining of the nation. That is, how the nation *should be* or even how it came to be is dramatized in the poems, plays, and stories available to readers both in and outside of the nation.

It is my contention in this essay that Catalan nationalism must be studied with an equivalent focus on Catalan language literature, as Catalan nationalists (and Catalan speakers) have imagined the role that the Catalan nation must play in the Iberian Peninsula through, primarily, political fictions. This is an essential point, as many people from and foreign to Catalonia may justify the nationalist movement on the grounds that the Catalan language was persecuted during various periods in Spanish history and, subsequently, read literary expression in Catalan as an inherently subversive political act.<sup>3</sup> This may be true depending on what political regime is being subverted, but it is not a statement true to the nuance of the class tensions and political jockeying characteristic of the history of the Iberian Peninsula in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Instead, I contend that the rise in Catalan-language literature is linked to the growth of a nationalistic bourgeoisie that uses the Catalan language as the cultural substratum that gives structure and character to the nation. Given the importance of the bourgeoisie in the modernization of Catalonia, bourgeois nationalism often spills over

---

<sup>3</sup> This attitude, common in other subaltern cultures whose languages have lost or do not hold political cache, is echoed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his book *Decolonising the Mind*, which posits that expression in the "mother tongue," the authentic link to the subaltern self, as opposed to the "language of the coloniser" is an anti-colonial act. This may be true, to an extent, but the logic supporting this claim is essentially Romantic, as language is used as a measurer of the authenticity or closeness in spirit to the soul of the people. This Romantic attitude will be discussed later in the essay.

into the realm of literature, particularly when older, outmoded literary forms such as the epic poem are used to mythify the origins of the nation and its political philosophy. Bourgeois origins notwithstanding, the evolution of a Catalan avant-garde and the importance of the novel, a literary form particularly given to the critique of ideology, have opened up a unique space in the Catalan canon to question the historically bourgeois suppositions of nationalism and the nation itself. In short, Catalan intellectuals, despite their class or national identity, write to imagine the nation, in a sense “making art to make the *pàtria*,” to borrow Kathryn Cramer’s phrase. This, however, does not signify that political thought is in perfect concord within the Catalan literary canon, as debates about the nation’s character and function are enacted using this same formula, evincing that the nation is written and unwritten.

In this paper, I give in chapter I a brief introduction to the beginning of the “age of nationalisms,” as Eric Hobsbawm terms the explosion in nationalist sentiment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and attempt to situate the Spanish case within this context. In turn, I will explain the importance of certain tools used during the Spanish nationalization process—tools such as reading and writing literary texts with an eye to uncovering a hidden “authentic” Spanish identity—with the intent of providing something of a comparative case to the Catalan, given the similarities between the two. The thrust of this section is that Romantic conceptions of nationhood and the corresponding national self that the individual possesses were popular in the Iberian Peninsula during the nineteenth century, with the concomitant effect that Spanish intellectuals (mirrored by their Catalan contemporaries) took to writing in order to construct the basis for modern Spain.

In chapter II, I proceed to analyze the Catalan case. This analysis includes a brief summary of Catalan history until the nineteenth century, with a special focus on the story of the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie that moved from the countryside to urban Catalonia. The result of this demographic change will be the birth of Catalan national consciousness, and the corollary reflowering of Catalan arts and letters. I intend to show here that, as is consonant with my thesis that the nation is written (and unwritten), creative expression legitimizes and authorizes the work of bourgeois nationalists. Further, the work of Jacint Verdaguer, one of Catalonia's finest poets, served to locate the origins of the modern Catalan nation in "time immemorial," a frequent characteristic of nationalist thought. Essentially, in chapter II I attempt to demonstrate how a particular Catalan nation, a bourgeois Catalan nation, was written in the late-nineteenth century.

In chapter III, I begin to complicate the notion of an unambiguous "Catalan national identity" based on the possession of language, the utmost expresser of *Volksgeist*, and a shared territory. Instead, I show that in Barcelona at the turn of the twentieth century a politically useful Catalan national identity was in a sense "up for grabs," open to manipulation by both the lower classes and bourgeoisie. The gradual appropriation of a Catalan national identity by the bourgeoisie leads to the conclusion that despite Catalans from different classes sharing the same language and territory, the existence of a unitary Catalan nation with a sole Catalan identity must be viewed as suspect, given the ideological and cultural divides in Catalonia during this time.

The complication of this notion of Catalan unity based on language and identity thus requires a reconsideration of how the nation is written and how a particular iteration or vision of the nation may be unwritten in the same language. In chapters IV and V I

attempt to show the paradoxical ability of writing to make and unmake the nation.

Chapter IV features a discussion of the ability of the novel as a form distinct from that of the epic poem or history to demonstrate the complexity of a given nation and the polyphony of its ideologies and voices. Chapter V, building on the complication of a unitary sense of Catalan national identity in chapter III, discusses how during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975) Catalan writers—specifically the author of this section’s focus, Mercè Rodoreda—wrote to save the Catalan nation (or the potential for a Catalan nation) while at the same time questioning the underlying *Geist* or *raison d’être* of Catalan nationalism, an emanation historically of the bourgeoisie.

## **Chapter I: The nineteenth-century politico-theological origins of Spanish and Catalan Nationalisms**

I begin this thesis with an exploration of the origins of nationalism in Europe, and in doing so I introduce the main theory that the nation is an “imagined community.” The decline and death of regimes of absolute truth in western and central Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided the ground upon which would be erected the various nationalist projects of the nineteenth century. From this point, truth and its concomitant political obligations begin to be understood as relative and historical rather than as immutable and transcendent. Privileged social groups became subject to the scrutiny of rivals across Europe and eventually beyond. The belief that a single language could adequately express universal truths, because it was “an inseparable part of that truth itself” (Anderson 69), was no longer tenable, rendering illegitimate (and even nonsensical) absolute monarchy’s claim to rule by divine right, derived from their possession of truth-as-language. In short, the situation that gave rise to nationalisms was one in which the bodies of the old gods, as Nietzsche might have said, had died and began to putrefy but whose spirits lived on in new forms.

The decline of the old European empires and their characteristic social groups such as the aristocracy and clergy, signaled by the above mutations, opened up a novel space in which geographically proximate communities became members of enclosed yet porous systems, known as nations; and the singular, culture-informed and culture-informing ideologies known as nationalisms slowly became the *de facto* religion of state. Due to what Benedict Anderson, prominent theorist of the cultural origins of nationalism, considers the recyclable form of the nation, something “capable of being consciously



aspired to” (Anderson 67), there arose opportunities for more than just “old nations,” as Seton-Watson terms old ethnic communities, to take part in a coterminous, often coterminous world-wide project. Particularly important in democratizing the nationalist projects were advancements in philology, which placed the languages of the world “on equal ontological footing,” each possessed of a different system of symbols or grammar (Anderson 71).

The corollary of dispensing with the idea of certain languages being more truthful than others was that the grammars and lexicons of all languages are equally worthy of study, given their “(intra-)mundan[ity]” (Anderson 71). The codification of vernacular languages in Europe, an unprecedented pattern before the 1830s, evinces the stirrings of self-conscious nationalism. One might go further and write that dictionaries, grammars, compendia of idioms, etc. permitted the newly powerful bourgeoisie of Europe to imagine their various constituencies as connected primarily through “possession” of a vernacular language. As Anderson points out, pre-bourgeois classes found ways of consolidating their political power and autonomy through non-language connections: namely, by marrying one another’s daughters and thus creating differential solidarities based on “bloodline.” But with the rise of codified languages and the subsequent revolution of mass print-media, the bourgeoisie, the central movers in the modernist nationalist projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, could for the first time identify (or imagine) themselves as forming a geographically bounded yet diffuse national community. (This is not, however, to suggest that all constituent groups that would become the primary consumers of a national print-media market had choice in the matter of the language of dissemination. In Great Britain, for instance, Gaelic and Welsh

went into decline after English became the language of the nation-state, so the issue of material-ideological power and its influence on the direction of state remained palpable.)

Eric Hobsbawm has posited that nationalism and the creation of nation-states involves the “invention” of traditions, a precondition that permits the individual to imagine himself a part of an abstract national community. Like Anderson, Hobsbawm sees the codification and dissemination of vernacular languages through education as a kind of “secular equivalent of the church” (Hobsbawm *Invented* 77), a former site of truth from which emanated the unquestionable power of the absolute sovereign. That is, educational institutions serve a purpose other than the ostensible one of enlightenment, which is to instill within its subjects the values and tools that are necessary to imagining oneself as part of a broader national community, a conclusion not altogether radical but one that acquires distinct implications in relation to the “constructed-ness” and novelty of the national project. Hobsbawm, while writing against a rigid notion of the nation as a natural organ evolved and evolving around a fixed set of timeless traditions, observes that a French historian of the Flemish language once pointed out that “the Flemish taught in Belgium today is not the language which the mothers and grandmothers of Flanders spoke to their children: in short, it is only metaphorically but not literally a ‘mother-tongue’”(Hobsbawm *Invented* 76). To paraphrase Nietzsche’s work on the *Genealogy of Morals*, even language, that shared network of changing concepts and ideas, is consciously constructed to comply with the values of the powerful, a truth that both gave rise to the various nationalist projects of the nineteenth century but, paradoxically, served to fix national identities by leading to the assumption that language must be the *authentic, immutable* expression of the national self.

If the standardization of vernacular languages in nineteenth century Europe allowed national consciousness to become *self*-consciousness, one of the key ways in which this transformation took place in Spain, an empire in decadence by the 1830s, was through historiography, itself made possible by the codification of the vernacular and the subsequent rise of a market for printed media. Spain of the nineteenth century was an idea continually being upheld and undone, an old state pressed by the need to modernize but hampered by vestigial or conservative social groups like the aristocracy and the Catholic Church, respectively. What is more, the country's political geography had changed little since the sixteenth century, when the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella unified the nation, redrawing the borders of the various sub-communities. José Alvarez Junco describes Spain thusly: "it comprised separate kingdoms with different legislations and autonomous institutions, which even maintained customs borders between them, thus differentiating the confederation from what we could today regard as a nation-state" (Alvarez Junco, Building 89). The difficulty, then, in creating a modern, "centralizing" if not centralized Spain was (and continues to be) the heterogeneous character of the "Spanish" people, which counted besides the dominant Castilian ethno-linguistic *pueblo* the Catalans, Basques, Galicians, Leonese, Andalusians, and Aragonese. To be precise: a common denominator of sorts, some trait that could be attributed to all those living within the peninsula had to be "discovered" as though it were a fossil. For without this most basic commonality there would be no "unisonance," to borrow Anderson's phrase, that makes possible nationalism. The failure of this project explains, in part, the rise of peripheral nationalisms, such as in Catalonia.

Historiography, returning to our narrative, intended to unify the nation by narrating it, albeit on the basis of a seemingly objective set of truths, creating clearly defined protagonists and their foils, actors from within and without the peninsula bent on frustrating the Spanish character from achieving its realization. Not only was Spain frustrated by its internal polyphony as much political as ethno-linguistic, which diversity gave rise to numerous wars of succession, but Napoleon's invasion also worsened the chronic indebtedness of the *corona*. The curious thing about the war that lasted from 1808 to 1814, sparked by Napoleon's presence and christened "the War of Independence," is that the historiography that it spawned often amounted to "enormous simplification, not to say ... outright falsification" (Alvarez Junco Building 91). Down to the very name of the war, which the French and British refer to as the "Peninsular War," Spanish historians, a relatively new group with respect to, say, the French or British intelligentsia, used the war as an abstract stage upon which to dramatize the struggle of an essential *castellanismo* against its internal and external enemies.

For one thing, it was not exactly a war of independence. Napoleon intended not to create a new French territory but to change the ruling dynasty, an action that many factions of the Spanish political elite had approved of in the past (Alvarez Junco Building 91). A couple of things obfuscated a more "objective" reading of the war (a reading that was perhaps *necessarily* nationalistic). For one, the intense xenophobia of the Spanish government, particularly strong with respect to the French (though the Catalans often allied themselves with France), encouraged a simplified narrative in which the French played the role of atheistic invaders intent on replacing a Catholic king, Ferdinand VII, with a secular Gaul. Similarly in this vein, the war cannot be properly considered a

strictly French-Spanish affair: it was “undoubtedly an international war” (Alvarez Junco Building 92). Many of the war’s major battles comprised clashes between the British and French armies, rather than the Spanish and French. And although there was certainly a Spanish contingent fighting the French, many Spanish intellectuals (Alvarez Junco asserts an almost even division between the two, in fact) fought against the British as well, warranting the claim that the conflict possessed aspects of the civil wars that would later rock the Peninsula.

All of this obfuscation and narrative embellishment fed the incipient nationalist project of the central Spanish state, which made the Second of May, on which a popular insurrection against Napoleon’s troops occurred in Madrid (notably not in Barcelona, Madrid’s competitor), a national holiday. Veering from the realm of historiography straight into narrative fiction, Spain’s premier realist writer of the nineteenth century, Benito Pérez Galdós, tantamount in importance to Leo Tolstoy or Honoré de Balzac, dedicated the third in his series of *National Episodes* to this uprising. The populist character of these mythologizations of the *pueblo* is consonant with the Romantic philosophy underpinning Spanish nationalist ideology, due in part to the influence of the German thinker Herder and his theory of the nation as the authentic expression of the spirit of the common people, or *Volksgeist*. These narratives of Spanishness fit into a larger historical imaginary that saw the Spanish people possessed of “a unique love...for their independence, a national trait which enabled them successively to defeat the best armies in the world” (Alvarez Junco Building 93), from Ancient Rome to Napoleonic France.

The Spanish nationalist project gradually acquired a more liberal character throughout the nineteenth century. The proliferation of historiography and nationalist literary texts such as Pérez Galdós's *Episodios nacionales* reveal that more than anything liberal intellectuals were searching for an authentic, pre-existing Castilian nation. These intellectuals deployed a familiar "time-immemorial" argument in favor of the existence of an "essential national character that...had survived wave after wave of invaders" (Alvarez Junco Building 96). To this end, liberal historians inveighed against monarchs who had further isolated the Spanish nation from modern intellectual influences that would have, to their minds, promoted national unity and uncovered the true Spanish character.

Again, the spread of nationalist sentiment across the Peninsula failed to occur. This was, in part, due to the problem that many liberal intellectual's dramatized in historiography, namely, that the deficiency of the federal state impeded Spanish self-realization. In the nineteenth century, Spain suffered due to weak monarchies, dynastic politics of succession, the conservatism of political elites, and inconsistent political ideology. What is more, the "chronic indebtedness" of the State caused the monarchy to seek recourse in burdening the peasantry and lower classes through an "'extraction-coercion' cycle" characteristic of an early-modern Europe (Alvarez Junco Building 99). What may have truly been the stick in the spokes of the nationalist project was the "openly apathetic" attitude of the monarchy toward propagating nationalist sentiment (Alvarez Junco Building 99). The unofficial coalition of an obsolescing landed gentry and conservative monarchy feared that nationalist sentiment would provoke a revolution of the people, due to which fear a wider nationalist project never had the support of the

central state. Obviously, the weakness of the *corona*, which punished its poorer subjects with military service and exorbitant rents and upheld the traditional privileges of the landed classes, exacerbated resentment respecting a unified Spanish identity and, thus, a unified nation.

It is at this point that the Spanish nationalist project becomes more conservative in character, searching for internal and external others upon which to pin the monetary problems of an imperial state in decline. William Viestenz convincingly argues that the middle of the nineteenth century is when a more conservative nationalist ideology fused with the increased importance of Catholicism to produce “*Nacionalcatolicismo*” (Grace 22). The retrograde brand of Catholic nationalism that gripped Spanish elites would later become the legitimating force behind *El Caudillo* Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, one based on the inseparability of church and state, to the exclusion of all alternative forms of “Spanishness” or even “Iberianism” as national identities.

Indeed, many political thinkers of varied ideologies professed a similarly structured theory of an obscured or hidden essential Spanishness. Among those influential thinkers who postulated a hidden yet essential Spanishness was Jaume Balmes, a Catholic priest from Vic, Catalonia. Balmes argued against Enlightenment social contract theories, presenting in their stead a “metaphysics of morality” of sacred origin, which would be the fount of public power (Viestenz, Grace 23). Against Hegel’s philosophy of history as the gradual realization of *Geist*, Balmes saw man and society as fundamentally good, naturally imbued with providential codes that are corrupted due to the instability of “human things” (Viestenz, Grace 23). The corollary of Balmes’s thought is that Spain should be governed based on *what is*, namely, the essential Spanish

character buried beneath the caprice of the secular world: ““nosotros fundamos en lo que *es*; nuestros adversarios se fundan en lo que *puede ser*”<sup>4</sup> (Viestenz, Grace 24).

Obviously, Balmes’s conception of the aim of Spanish politics is inextricably linked to Catholic thought, but it was the Spanish political theorist Juan Donoso Cortés who would infuse this theory of politics with an apology for dictatorship. Donoso Cortés, against the regionalist tendencies present in the Iberian Peninsula, argued that a strong, central dictatorship, a correlate of a self-aware national character, was necessary to reign in oppressively secular influences (such as regionalist politics in the Basque Country and Catalonia) that impede the realization of authentic *castellanismo*.

Though it seems natural that Catholic nationalist sentiment would promulgate a conservative, xenophobic (both of the external and internal Other) brand of Spanishness this metaphysical conception of a *raza castellana* was displaced to the realm of the secular in the thought of *la Generación del ’98*, a liberal intellectual group consisting of (among others) Miguel de Unamuno and Ramiro de Maeztu. What those Catholic nationalists saw in the Spanish state, so too did this “generation.” And with good reason, perhaps, since 1898 was the year in which liberal intellectuals of middle-class Spain witnessed their rationalist, positivistic efforts at restoring Spain to its colonial glory while modernizing its obsolescent (if not obsolete) government come to nothing, or so the humiliating loss in open combat of several colonies to the U.S. seemed to signify to this generation. This was then the immediate cause for the existence of the Generation of ‘98, a loosely connected group of essayists, novelists, poets, and intellectuals—in short, men

---

<sup>4</sup> “We found ourselves on what *is*; our adversaries found themselves on what *might be*.”—Translation mine.



(and some women) who put the philosophy of *regeneracionismo* (literally regenerationism) to work in artistic texts before, say, taking arms against the weak central state for its inadequacies. Essentially, these thinkers would dramatize the struggle for Spanish national identity (a struggle that would also find an analogue in Catalonia) by thinking—that is, rereading, reinterpreting, and rewriting Spanish history—through essential Western literary forms. It is appropriate to appraise a few of their efforts.

*Regeneracionismo* was not a home-styled philosophy but comprised influences from beyond Spain, most notably from Germany, where Krausism (after Karl Krause, a theologian) began, which philosophy became very popular with the Generation of 98.<sup>5</sup> However, it was not entirely at odds with more obviously conservative Spanish philosophies of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It did not, for one, posit as being mutually both exclusive advances in science and technology and the importance of faith. In fact, Krausism represented a sustained effort to try to reconcile “positivistic rational inquiry with religious faith and establish an environment of free enquiry” (Viestenz, Grace 26). In short, Krausism inspired many Spanish intellectuals to reconcile Catholicism, at least as old as the Spanish state, with rational enquiry, leading some to seek the sacred origins of the Spanish nation through rational enquiry. This was the approach of José Ortega y Gasset of the “*Generación de 14*,” sometimes known as *novecentismo*.

Ortega y Gasset advocated a Krausist approach to the creation of national sentiment through reading and writing literary texts. The best example of his thinking on

---

<sup>5</sup> It became especially popular with Leopoldo Alas “Clarín,” author of the epic realist novel *La regenta*, which many Spanish critics place in the same class as *El Quijote*, itself a work that has been deployed as an authentic expression of Spanishness.

the matter is the essay *Meditaciones del Quijote* (“Meditations on Don Quixote”<sup>6</sup>), in which he proposes that *El Quijote* is among those sacred cultural figures that communicate objective truths about the Spanish character: ““La cultura nos proporciona objetos ya purificados, que alguna vez fueron vida espontánea e inmediata, y hoy, gracias a la labor reflexiva, parecen libres del espacio y del tiempo, de la corrupción y del capricho””<sup>7</sup> (quoted in Viestenz, Grace 28). Moreover, Ortega y Gasset believed the Catholic faith to be an additional component of an essential Castilianism able to be apprehended through “intellective seeing.” Similarly, the other intellectual giant of the turn of twentieth century, Miguel de Unamuno, while rejecting the foreign “*barbarismo*” of Krausism all the same advocated for the conversion of *casticismo* into a political and “philosophical category,” *el casticismo* being “a secularized caste of ‘Spanishness’ hidden, vertically, deep in the state’s layered sediment” (Viestenz, Grace 29). Here again do we see an intellectual intending to read (and thereby define) the nation through a fictional text that is enshrined as possessing some inherent Spanish value or essence; Unamuno views the dynamic between Sancho Panza and the Knight as a fundamentally

---

<sup>6</sup> This title could also be translated “Meditations of Don Quixote,” a telling ambiguity lost in translation that suggests the act of thinking through that classic novel and simultaneously *being thought through* by the novel. That is, Ortega y Gasset is hinting at the dual power of the novel as both a site of creation and an analytical form. And to extend the latent meaning of the title even further, it could be the Ortega y Gasset is suggesting that Don Quijote *is* the (then) modern Spaniard, thus the meditations both belong to and deal with that most Spanish of Spaniards.

<sup>7</sup> “Culture grants us already-purified objects that at some time were spontaneous and immediate life, and today, thanks to the work of reflection, seem free of space and time, of corruption and caprice.”—Translation mine.

Spanish equation. To Unamuno, then, the Spanish character is the nexus of “*idealismo quijotesco con... realismo sanchopancino*”<sup>8</sup> (*En torno al casticismo*).

In this section, I have shown how in the Iberian Peninsula Spanish nationalism spread in a manner consonant with that theorized by Benedict Anderson. “Spanishness” was constructed through the mythification of key moments in the young nation’s history, through the embellishment, for example, of the accounts of Spain’s participation in the Napoleonic Wars. The historiography that sought to posit an essential Spanishness defined by the Spanish national’s love of independence was also made possible by, among other things, the importance of printing in the vernacular language, itself thought to be the authentic expression of the Spanish people. The purported ability of texts written in the vernacular to ascertain the essence of the national character, thus leading to the enshrinement of these texts, was also proposed by thinkers such as Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset. The development of nationalism takes for its foundation, as is apparent, creative expression, a pattern also evidenced in the Catalan case. Nevertheless, the failure of the Spanish central state’s attempts to unite the denizens of the Peninsula around a common identity is attributable to the overall weakness of these efforts, the financial precariousness of the state, and the increasing wealth of peripheral regions undergoing industrialization, most notably the Basque territory and Catalonia. The rise of Catalan nationalism, which will be explored in the next section, is in part then made possible by the failures of Spanish nationalism.

---

<sup>8</sup> “quixotic idealism with... sancho-panzan realism...”—Translation mine.

## **Chapter II: The Case of the Catalans: From the Renaixença to fin-de-siècle Barcelona**

*Formation(s) of Catalonia since the Eleventh Century: The “language, literature, nation” equation*

Catalan difference with respect to the rest of the Iberian Peninsula is not necessarily a new phenomenon or attitude. In fact, we can trace the lineage of Catalan “Otherness” back to the eleventh century. Due to the frustration of the Spanish government’s attempts in the nineteenth century to further unify the peninsula and bring under its purview all peripheral ethno-linguistic nations, this centuries-old Catalan Otherness was vented culturally and politically. Catalonia, which occupies the northeastern corner of the Iberian Peninsula, was unified in the eleventh century, after which it became a rising commercial power in the Mediterranean (though with a strong agricultural base) from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Part of a confederation of kingdoms known as the Crown of Aragón, Catalonia’s commercial ascendancy produced a flourishing in the literary and scientific arts, producing such notable writers as Ramón Llull and Ausiàs March, among others, both of whom would significantly influence the direction of European theology and poetry during the Renaissance and the Reformation. Despite Catalonia’s mercantile supremacy in the Peninsula, the bubonic plague decimated the Catalan population, ending the nation’s rise. Catalonia’s subsequently impoverishment caused the state and its people to fall under the influence of the Kingdom of Castile, which would later become the Spanish national state (Medrano 22).

Catalonia’s new position as a semi-autonomous territory of the Castilian kingdom permitted the nation certain modes of political expression, such as the Aragonese *cortes*, which were essentially parliaments comprising the estates of Catalonia that would enact

general laws (Medrano 24). These *cortes* were presided over by the *Generalitat*, their “permanent delegation” that oversaw tax collection and the implementation of law (Medrano 24). Essentially home-rule institutions, the *cortes* contributed to the sense of Catalonia as a foreign nation among the unified kingdoms of the Peninsula, an attitude evidenced by Castile’s preference for Genoese goods over Catalan goods and the existence of customs barriers between the two kingdoms. The historically less-than amicable relations between Castilla and Catalonia, then, reveal the later difficulties the Spanish central government would have in incorporating Catalonia into the body politic. Before the nineteenth century, when the Spanish government began to attempt this incorporation in earnest, the *Decreto de Nueva Planta* (1707-1716) already eliminated customs barriers between the two nations, made Castilian the official legal language of Catalonia, and began the military occupation of Catalonia (Medrano 35).

Until the industrialization of Catalonia, beginning in the eighteenth and with serious speed gained in the nineteenth century, the nation lived under a Spanish government that possessed pretensions of putting into effect the centralizing project discussed above. As Barrington Moore noted in his monumental study of the *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, the scholar interested in locating the beginnings of capitalist modernity in Europe (and beyond) must look to changes in the life of the peasantry. This is certainly true for Catalonia, as the rapid industrialization of that region, occurring earlier than in most Spanish communities, began in the countryside. One of the curious contingencies of the case is that Catalonia’s further integration into Spain in 1716 was one of the primary facts that pushed Catalonia to renewed prosperity later in the century. Because Catalonia could now participate “more directly in trade with the rest of

Spain and with the colonies of Latin America,” Catalan producers enjoyed an expanded market for their goods (Medrano 45). In addition to expanded market access, low population density of the countryside and relatively unrestricted liberties granted to the peasantry due to reforms in seigniorial law sowed the seeds for the eventual flowering of the Catalan *granger* into the urban bourgeois.

Why did low population density contribute to capitalist economic development in Catalonia? For one, due to laws that reined in seigniorial abuses of peasant labor, a prosperous peasantry began to develop as seigniors saw it wiser to invest in the productivity of medium-sized parcels of land rather than charge higher rents on smaller parcels of land and speculate on the productivity of these (Medrano 45). Moreover, the peculiarities of tenant law in the countryside facilitated the flow of capital from the countryside into urban Catalonia. During the eighteenth century, many parcels of land were unable to be partitioned among inheritors. Those who received no portion of the land, however, received an “economic compensation” (Medrano 46). The steadily increasing productivity of the medium-sized parcels of land made such recompenses and capital available for investment proportionally larger. Finally, given the industrial bourgeoisie’s recognition of the high demand for Catalan exports, urban groups subverted the dominance of the guild system by buying raw wool from other parts of Spain and having it processed in the Catalan countryside, a further example of the direct capital flows between urban and rural Catalonia. This connection between the two regions will become part of certain founding myths of Catalonia, with many members of the urban bourgeoisie recalling fondly their own past as part of the industrious peasantry (see, for example, Jacint Verdaguer’s poem *El Canigó*).

The bourgeois character of Catalan nationalism begins to solidify in the nineteenth century. The prosperity of Catalonia relative to other regions in Spain necessitated the creation and promotion of a strong sense of *catalanisme*, for reasons I will now explain. Catalan capitalism depended, for one, upon the Spanish market for demand (including the Latin American colonies). Given the high production costs of industry specific to Catalonia, which had to import almost all of its coal, Catalonia relied upon Spanish protectionism to keep major Catalan producers afloat. Moreover, labor struggles in the latter half of the nineteenth century also promoted reliance upon the central Spanish state to safeguard the stability of the region, the result of Catalonia having no military of its own and very weak methods of repression. The Catalan bourgeoisie and political elite, recognizing their dependence upon Spain as a whole, first intended to *become* the Spanish state, a desire demonstrated by the large numbers of Catalans working as politicians in Madrid throughout the mid-century. Failing to maintain large enough numbers of Catalan politicians in Madrid, due to Catalonia's history of self-governance and the difficulty that most Catalans had speaking Castilian (Balcells 22), and therefore failing to remake Spain in its own image, the Catalan political elite was forced to seek other recourses.

To wield the ideological power of the central state that would ensure the malleability of urban and rural labor and also fix the appropriate levels of market penetration into the countryside required to smooth the road of industrialization, the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie began to promote a strong sense of Catalan nationalism. Rather than continue trying to "become" the Spanish state and consequently give up Catalan, one of the remaining few vestiges of *catalanisme*, the political elite focused

more within their own region than without, a move made possible by the continued (though not without difficulties) advancement of industry throughout the century (Balcells 21).

As important as language was in deterring Catalonia from greater political integration into Spain, language was perhaps more important in forging a newly robust sense of Catalanism. The state of Catalan in the nineteenth century was far from lamentable, though it is true that language had fallen out of usage within official, legal, and political contexts. One reason for the largely oral usage of Catalan as opposed to more official and artistic uses was the cultural oppression of Spain. As the Catalan writer Mañé i Flaquer noted, ““Unfortunately, thanks to the misguided policy that has been applied to Catalonia, the Catalans have stopped being Catalans without becoming Spaniards”” (Balcells 22). By dint of state repression and the desuetude of the Catalan language, nationalism in Catalonia has since the nineteenth century tended to associate the liberation of an authentic Catalan spirit, an idea structurally similar to theories of national Spanishness discussed above, as inherently and inextricably linked to the promotion of the language. Already in the nineteenth century the publication, study, and promotion of the Catalan language is seen as a tool of national liberation, what Kathryn Cramer describes as the “language, literature, and Catalanism” equation at the core of the imagining of modern Catalonia.

Many Catalan literary scholars view Bonaventura Carles Aribau’s poem *Oda a la Pàtria*, published in 1833, as the natural start of literary nationalism in Catalonia, not because that single poem did create a nation-wide system of bourgeois self-recognition but because this poem (along with a handful of others written in Catalan) restored faith in



Catalan's usage as a literary language. As Anderson's work demonstrates, it is necessary in order to build the essential cultural foundation of the nation to uphold the belief in a vernacular language as being capable of communicating not only in official and legal settings but also being a potential vehicle for artistic expression as well, especially in view of the popularity of the Romantic thought of Fichte and Herder in Catalonia at the time (Crameri 19). The philosophical and literary thought of these two Germans defined literature as the most authentic expression of *Volksgeist*, the spirit of the people, without which a nationalist project could never get off the ground for want of essence (Crameri 19). Thus, culture, in the sense of the composite of creative expression (including linguistic expression) native to a particular region, forms what seems to nationalists the essential component of a particular nation. This is already evident in view of the work of the Generation of 98, a group of thinkers who stressed the reinterpretation of Spanish-language literature as a means of uncovering the "*gema iridiscente*" of Spanish identity buried beneath layers of false history.

To pick up our narrative thread, though Aribau's poem may be the symbolic first salvo of Catalanism's renewed vitality, the *Renaixença*, the flourishing of the Catalan art and literature beginning around 1850, represents the widespread self-consciousness of what Timothy Brennan terms "nation-ness." That is, the *Renaixença* is the first epoch in which Catalan writers began to forge a national identity and consequently a nation through writing in Catalan. In this sense, the meaning of *Renaixença* is significant in more than one understanding of the word: though it signifies "rebirth," invoking the more widely known idea of the "Renaissance" of European culture after the Middle Ages, it

also implies the “(re)birth of a nation,” one that had lived under the thumb of another state for centuries.

A key moment during this rejuvenation of Catalonia is the *Jocs Florals* (“flower games”), held for the first time in 1859 but hearkening back to the medieval oral traditions of the troubadours of Provençal. These geographically dispersed poetry competitions, although local emanations such as that of Barcelona were sponsored by and comprised the Catalan middle classes, existed not to create a significant body of “quality” literary work in Catalan but to rather provide a self-reflexive space for proto-Catalanists to gather to “read and admire each other’s work,” “important as a catalyst for Catalanism” (Cramer 16). In contrast to this period of renewal of the Catalan language as a creative, expressive mechanism through the re-discovery of a centuries-old literary language,<sup>9</sup> Spain’s central government continued to repress the Catalan language in both its spoken and written variants, which only increased the ire of the fledgling Catalan intelligentsia. Naturally, because of the abovementioned links between language, literature, and national identity, any affront to the Catalan language was sure to be perceived as a depreciation of the Catalan people and its way of life.

Without a robust national canon, Catalanists of the nineteenth century, who again tended to be conservative members of the bourgeoisie, did not think their claim to nationhood was legitimate. Enric Prat de la Riba, author of *La nacionalitat catalana* (1909), helmed the *Mancomunitat*, a cultural institution active in all four Catalan provinces that sought the “protection and promotion” of Catalan culture, during which

---

<sup>9</sup> (though a language that bore less of a relation to the speech of Catalan speakers living in rural parts of the nation, a fact that becomes important in the latter part of our history)

time he clearly defined the essential Catalan equation of “fer art = fer pàtria,” to make art is to make the nation (Crameri 18). Take the following excerpt from *La nacionalitat catalana*, for example:

El poble que no ha sapigut construir una llengua pròpia, és un poble esguerrat, perquè la llengua és la manifestació més perfecta de l'esperit nacional i l'instrument més poderós de la nacionalització, i per lo tant de la conservació i vida de la nacionalitat (quoted in Crameri 20).<sup>10</sup>

This iron law of Catalan identity, that the nation is expressed through the *construction* of a language and all this implies (such as creating a robust literary canon), bears striking similarities to the cultural theories promulgated by the Generation of '98 and Jaume Balmes, himself a Catalan priest. That is, not only does written artistic expression in Catalan in some sense bolster the legitimacy of the nation in itself, but this also means that the essence of the nation can be apprehended through literary texts themselves (in addition to other cultural practices, such as dances or dress). The almost simultaneous arrival at the same conclusion on the part of Spanish and Catalan nationalists demonstrates the viability (or at the least the popular perception of viability) of constructing a nation through the written and spoken word that was common in Western and Central Europe. In the case of Catalonia, however, a nation oppressed culturally by Spain, the paucity of literary texts and the major gap in the “Catalan canon” created more opportunities for literary nationalism during the nineteenth century in comparison to their

---

<sup>10</sup> “The people that has not known how to construct a language of their own, is a crippled people, because language is the most perfect manifestation of the national spirit and the most powerful instrument of nationalization, and for that reason the conservation and life of the national identity.”—Translation mine.

Castilian-speaking counterparts, forced to rely on the existing body of texts in that language.

The *Jocs florals* and generally the *Renaixença* invited the recovery and even invention of a Catalan-language literary canon, valuable as much for artistic considerations as for the purpose of forging a nationality. Born of this milieu, in which young Catalan poets didn't have to fear scrutiny from literary critics given their task of filling in centuries-long gaps of what was presumed to be a lost literary history, was Jacint Verdaguer, perhaps Catalonia's most original and important poet since the Valencian, Ausiàs March (1400-1459). Verdaguer's work is important as much for its literary merit (which is very high) but also for his vaulting ambition to become "Catalonia's 'national poet'" (Crameri 20). As Montserrat Reguant observes in her classic, *Etapas reivindicativas de la teoria nacional catalana*, the centuries long gaps in literary production in Catalonia left the fledgling nation without many of the "great" forms of literature: that is, tragic theater or, more importantly, the national epic that put other nations such as Portugal, Greece, or France on the map.<sup>11</sup> Verdaguer, writing in the 1860s and -70s, sought to fill these gaps with epic poetry, a form that Bakhtin described as being antiquated with respect to the novel form that had become popular in the nineteenth century (about which I will write more below). As I will show, Verdaguer's

---

<sup>11</sup> For a similar figure in European literary history, see the Finnish Elias Lönnrot, whose *Kalevala* (1849), a compilation of oral folk tales and myths from the then non-independent Finland, helped to solidify a more widespread conception of Finnishness and stimulated the stirrings of popular consciousness that would lead Finns to embrace a cultural identity distinct to that of Russia or Sweden. It is also no coincidence that Lönnrot's work is roughly contemporaneous with that of Verdaguer.

epic project was both parts practical and literary (although perhaps both imply one another).

As Reguant notes, because of Catalonia's lack of standing army and other coercive powers, intellectuals were the most important political actors, ideological power being most important to the first wave of political Catalanism in the 1860s. Indeed, it was the task of Catalan writers and intellectuals to fuse national sentiment with the physical geography purportedly encompassed by the idea of Catalonia. John Etherington describes the mythologization and subsequent fusion of geography and nation thusly:

the relationship between nation and territory is generally considered by nationalists to be 'immutable,' stretching back to the mists of time...and primordial in the sense that national attachment to and control of a given homeland forms part of the natural world and the human condition (1817).

Geography, in other words, is not just the space that the nation encompasses but is also a psycho-geography imbued with cultural significance thought to be an indivisible component of the spirit of the nation's people. Every map divided along national borders, then, is a quiet reassertion of the myths the people of nations tell about themselves in the effort of justifying their claim over a piece of territory naturally indifferent to spiritual-national meaning and identity.

Verdaguer's epic poetry projected these meanings of nation-ness onto the geography of Catalonia. Again, it is important to first understand the broader context of the *Renaixença* before launching into a reading of Verdaguer's work. Much of the literature performed throughout the *Jocs florals* featured an "insistence on an idyllic rural life and the 'bon pagès' (good farmer)" (Etherington 1822), a fact that seems surprising

in consideration of the character of nationalistic Catalanism, which still was driven by an industrial, urban bourgeoisie (though one with a not too distant past located in the countryside). More than just a typically Romantic idealization of nature as an antidote to the ills of modernity, this body of poetry posited and reinforced an inherent connection between the Catalan people and the territory they had historically inhabited, even if now life in the Catalan *terra* had become urbanized. Verdaguer appears here, during the *Jocs florals* of Barcelona in 1865, presenting prizes in “country attire, complete with a *barretina*, a traditional floppy red cap worn by shepherds in Catalonia” (Etherington 1823). Here, again, we see the paradox that often inheres in nationalism: fidelity to what is perceived as a traditional and authentic manifestation of a national culture despite the fundamental change in the day-to-day cultural practices in that same nation.

Verdaguer’s epic *El canigó* about a mountain of the same name in the Catalan Pyrenees can be read as an attempt to annex, not through force but through language, territory for Catalonia. The poem, which fuses a “Romantic historical version of the birth of Catalonia and the expulsion of the Moors” (Etherington 1823), intends to both define the geography of Catalonia but also to proffer a spiritual vision of the Canigou linking physical terrain with *Volksgeist*. To this end, Verdaguer rewrites the expulsion of the Moors from Iberia as the necessary realization of the Catalan spirit, the presence of the Moors representing the frustration of a “true” Catalan history. Obviously, this theological-poetical reading of Catalan history fits within broader peninsular thought, like that of Balmes or the Generation of ’98, both of which saw certain epochs as either more or less exemplary of an essential nationalism. In Verdaguer’s reading, the expulsion of the Moors is a move authorized by God that in turn births Catalonia:

Glory to the Lord! Now we have our homeland/how high  
 it is, how strong its awakening/ behold how it rests on the  
 Pyrenees/its head in the sky, its feet in the sea/... Oh  
 homeland, victory gives you its wings/like a sun of gold  
 your star arises/throw westwards the chariot of your  
 glory/arise, with God's impulse, oh Catalonia,  
 onwards/Onwards, through the mountains, land and sea, do  
 not stop/the Pyrenees are already too small for your  
 thrones/for being great today, you shall awake/In the  
 shadow of the cross (quoted in Etherington 1825).

Under the auspices of “God’s impulse,” the Catalans have mapped onto their territory their essential selves. And, as Eric Hobsbawm argues in *The Age of Revolution*, the nationalist spirit in Europe is complemented by pretensions of territorial expansion, of reclaiming a rightful spiritual patrimony from foreign lands. Verdaguer’s spiritual vision of Catalonia, the grandeur of which makes the Pyrenees shrink in comparison so that they are “too small for [Catalonia’s] thrones,” does just this. Though a nation without a state, Catalonia’s titanic spirit authorizes its territorial ambitions, a condition itself made possible by Verdaguer’s work and which is explored in greater depth in his *L’Atlàntida*.

With respect to the existence of the Canigou (and thus Catalonia) in time, Verdaguer ascribes to the mountain and Catalonia an eternal past, present, and future, also conditioned by God’s election of Catalonia as unique among other peoples. If the artifice of states such as Spain is mirrored by the destructibility of their physicality, their monuments, public buildings, and the like, then the permanence of Romantic “Nature” augurs a much more viable basis for the construction of Nation so long as Nature is constructed as the “spiritual reservoir” of a people, borrowing here Etherington’s terminology. Thus Verdaguer writes:

What one century constructs, another brings it down to the  
 earth / but the monument of God always remains; / and

neither storm, driven snow, hatred or war / will bring  
 Canigó to earth / nor tear down the lofty Pyrenees (quoted  
 in Etherington 1826).

Here we see a reversal of sorts of Shelley's *Ozymandias*, in which Nature serves as the bedrock for a nation, the Catalan, rather than being a synonym for the inevitable erosion of the same.

The beauty of Verdaguer's work (and its paradox) is in its equation of the Catalan landscape to the Catalan language, the two being intimately bound despite the latter's obvious historicity. Take, for example, Verdaguer's assessment of another fearsome mountain of the Pyrenees: "Los estrangers que obiren de lluny eixa muntanya, / —Aquell gegant—exclamen—és un gegant d'Espanya, / d'Espanya i català" (Verdaguer 60).<sup>12</sup> The natural order of language is here reversed, again. Verdaguer projects onto the mountain the essence of the Catalan people, their language ("...i català," rather than "Catalunya," the nation itself). Catalan had fallen out of usage as a language of literature, state, and culture, then, not because its value had somehow dissipated. Contrary to the thought of Unamuno or Ortega y Gasset, who both posited Spain's other languages as valuable cultural curiosities but extraneous in comparison to the *true* language of the Spanish people, Verdaguer is reaffirming the import of Catalan (and, of course, Catalonia), a language protected by God and a permanent monument, like the mountain, to the exceptionality of the Catalan people. That is, Catalan as a language, like the mountain that defines the spirit of Catalonia, is prior to any ephemeral politics that would seek to place the artifice of an inauthentic, usurper state (the Spanish) above the Catalan nation.

---

<sup>12</sup> "Foreigners that glimpse from afar that mountain: "That giant," they exclaim, "is a giant of Spain, of Spain and Catalan."—Translation Mine



Though moving in the wake of the invalidation of language as a vehicle of truth, as discussed above, Verdaguer strengthens his nascent nation-state's claim to legitimacy by maintaining God as the sole referent of truth and as language and Nature as valid emanations of His guarantee. In this sense, Verdaguer's work is slightly conservative, as the premise of the authenticity of Catalan as the expression of *Volksgeist* relies on its being sanctioned by divine will.

It might strike one as strange that, given the industrial, bourgeois character of the Catalan nationalist movement, some of the primary texts within the Catalan canon would deal extensively with the countryside and its inhabitants, people usually of a different way of life. By idealizing and mythologizing the not-too-distant past of the Catalan bourgeoisie, with its roots in the countryside, Verdaguer (among others) effectively reconciles the compresence of both groups and even reconciles the peasantry to the bourgeoisie. Because industrialization and modernization occur at great costs to those forced to bear their burden, typically the peasantry, the nineteenth century of Spain and Catalonia in particular witnessed many revolts in the agricultural sector against the modernizing currents of the state. In fact, between 1826 and 1874, four different wars fought over Carlism (a conservative political ideology supported by landed aristocrats and rural folk) took place in Catalonia alone (Etherington 1827). Unrest in the countryside was mirrored by unrest in the cities, an impediment to the rapid growth needed to build Catalonia's legitimacy. And, as I mentioned above, Catalonia could not count on the Spanish central state to crack down on recalcitrant worker movements nor did it possess a coercive state force with which to ensure the pliability of the population. For this, a compromise between the rural and urban sectors needed to occur. Verdaguer's

poem, then, emblemizes the contradiction of late nineteenth-century Catalanism, in that it posits the peasantry as the “spiritual reserve” of urban, industrial Catalonia, which is endowed with legitimacy by virtue of its middle-class inhabitants’ trans-historical connection to the countryside. Though they may have moved out of the countryside, the bourgeoisie still retain the essential character, the “spiritual reserve” that gives them the right to direct the future of the nation.

The paragraphs that follow that deal with Verdaguer’s other significant epic poem, *L’Atlàntida*, intend to offer a more narrative-based reading of what some believe to be the poet’s *magnum opus*. It is a highly allusive and metaphorically dense text, riddled with references to classical mythology, Catholic theology, and antediluvian geography, all of which factors in combination make a difficult task of reading and an especially difficult task to summarize its nuanced political message. I will go through the key moments from the text, providing a critical reading of its narrative devices as well as its Catalanist philosophy, which I will then summarize after the whole has been assessed.

Verdaguer’s *L’Atlàntida* bears a similar relation to Catalonia as *El Canigó* does, both of which are notable for their usage of myth and intertextual allusion. *L’Atlàntida* is another founding myth of Catalonia, drawing from Greek and Roman myth and European epic poetry. The poem possesses an intriguing narrative structure influenced in part by the *Thousand and One Nights* in the sense that the bulk of the narrative is framed within a dialogue between a wise man and his pupil of sorts. The introductory canto tells of a shipwreck in the Atlantic off the coast of Iberia, from which a young boy survives and is taken to the “platonic cave” of the wise man, the representation of J. Verdaguer (Reguant 52). The “genius of the Atlantic” begins to relay to the boy, a mythic Christopher

Columbus, the story of the lost city of Atlantis and its drowned glory (another metaphor for the essence of a people being covered yet yearning for actualization; 52). Columbus, as much an elusive historical figure as a fictionalized canvas upon which to project narratives of discovery and exploration, comes to represent in the introductory canto “cualquier catalán,” looking for his or her nation, possessing “la capacidad no sólo de encontrar sino de conquistar” (Reguant 53).<sup>13</sup> That is, making use of Columbus’s obvious, nearly mythical reputation as a discoverer and creator of “new worlds” Verdaguer renders the Catalan national project as not only a re-discovery of a lost nation and its glory but also as a nation with the capacity to conquer new territories, both artistic and concrete. This latter aspect of Verdaguer’s work fits with Hobsbawm’s theory of nationalism, which posits that a nation can only be considered thus if it has the capacity and will to recreate itself elsewhere.

Verdaguer’s *L’Atlàntida*, though a highly peculiar text, particularly in its treatment of the geography of Catalonia and in making Columbus a Catalan, strives toward universality in its message and its influences. Although the concept of a literary canon is thought to exist independently of any political or historical context and occupy, rather, the sphere of universality in which all expression is assumed to bear one monolithic meaning (see, for example, Harold Bloom’s work on a “universal” literary canon for a demonstration of this principle), it is rooted in time and place. Verdaguer’s *Atlantis* fits well into the Catalan canon for its universality, the product of Verdaguer’s reservoir of influences. But universality is not a good desired for its own intrinsic properties, which is the traditional approach to the study of the Western canon. Instead,

---

<sup>13</sup> “The capacity not only to find but also to conquer.”—Translation mine.

the canon and its purported universality should be understood as emanations of a common movement in the West to justify the timelessness of a trans-historical conception of the nation-state. This is not to say that all attempts to find the universal in literature are fruitless, but it is worth noting that universality often masks deeper political truths that need uncovering in order to more fully appreciate both a piece of art or the individual's approximation of identity.

One way in which Verdaguer aims for the universal in *L'Atlàntida* is through the use of the myths of antiquity to construct a Catalonia that has existed since time immemorial though that has suffered through various states of dormancy or complacency. In Verdaguer's nearly antediluvian vision of the world presented in the first canto of the poem, Hercules is given the task of founding a new nation after the giant Gerió dethrones the Queen of Spain, Pyrene, whose name makes obvious reference to the Pyrenees, the mountains that bear a spiritual connection to the Catalan people. Pyrene, the queen, incarnates this same spirit, which idea becomes all the more clear when we consider that members of the Catalan intelligentsia during the *Renaixença* referred to the Catalan language as their queen: ““No era pas morta la reina només dormia”” (Reguant 56).<sup>14</sup> Catalonia, then, never died but instead remained dormant or oppressed by its neighbors, Spain or France. Indeed, Gerió the giant can be read as either a Napoleonic figure, invading the Peninsula and subjugating its peoples, or even as Spain itself (Reguant 57). Hercules narrowly escapes Gerió off the coast of Catalonia on a ship sent by Jupiter. Hercules promises the founding of a city that will be the crown of a new kingdom on the site of his rescue, which city he names Barcelona. Here, we begin to see a new set of

---

<sup>14</sup> ““The queen was not dead but rather sleeping.””—Translation mine.

associations forming: Barcelona with Hercules, both of whom are saviors of the Catalan people and language. These associations are all the more clear in view of Catalonia's reputation during the Middle Ages as a naval power.

After fleeing Geri6, Hercules travels to the lost city of Atlantis before it is inundated for its "corruption and ambition" (Reguant 60). There, he intends to flee with the queen of Atlantis, Hesperis, in order to travel back to pre-Catalonia and found a new nation. The political allegory of this section of the poem, the third canto, obtains in the relation between Hesperis and the city of Atlantis, condemned to inundation because it has lost favor with the gods. The association of Catalonia now with Atlantis sheds light on the politics of contemporary Spain, which Verdaguer believed to be not so much ruining as submerging Catalonia deeper beneath the corruption and dynastic quarrels of the central state. In the fourth canto, the poet develops this allegory by introducing, again, into his narrative the Judeo-Christian God, who condemns Atlantis to destruction and shortly after breaks up all of the nations in the world into separate continents.

The conclusion of the poem finds Hercules and Hesperis arriving at one of the newly created islands in the wake of the divine flood, where the two begin to construct a new civilization. Verdaguer, who makes clear again the connection between Queen Hesperis, her nation, and the nation's language, suggests in the final cantos that without the salvation of Hesperis the project to rebuild the formerly great nation of Atlantis elsewhere would have failed. Already a few different levels of profundity begin to emerge from the poem's conclusion. One, that Verdaguer is both dramatizing and prescribing the reconstruction of Catalonia on the basis of its language and former glory of past centuries (the use of which language in a more archaic form would absorb the

attentions of intellectuals during the Francoist years). Hesperis, emblem of the Catalan language, and Hercules, emblem of the courage needed to cut through the corruption of the modern state, are both converted in the poem into heroic figures that not only entertain but also provide *instruction*, instruction that has for its moral basis the just cause of nation building.

Two, we might say that Verdaguer reasserts a kind of particularistic universalism. That is, the conclusion of the poem, in which several new nations are formed, upholds the universal validity of the national form, despite the particularities of each territory and people that seek to apply this form. When Verdaguer writes about how the new nation Catalonia constructed from the ruins of Atlantis takes for one of its signs of identity “una virgen negra” (a black virgin), he is not absentmindedly committing to paper an anachronism or absurdity. Rather, he is reasserting the universal validity of the national form, its widespread utility being symbolized by the dark skin color of the patron virgin: “El hecho de que el narrador insista en el color de la piel confirma el interés del autor en ampliar la entrada a las nuevas naciones o naciones renacientes de África y el Caribe, que se pueden identificar con esta nación ideal, modelo de las demás” (Reguant 70).<sup>15</sup>

*L’Atlàntida*, then, is as much an epic paeon to Catalonia and its antique glory as it is an homage to the nation as a concept. Catalonia is privileged in this nationalist worldview, as it is Columbus, re-baptized a Catalan by revisionist historians, who at the beginning of the poem is charged with diffusing the nationalist lessons of the poem to the New World.

---

<sup>15</sup> “The fact that the narrator insists on her skin color confirms the interest of the author in broadening the entrance of the new nations or renascent nations of Africa and the Caribbean that can identify themselves with this ideal nation, a model for the rest.”—Translation mine.

In the next section, I pick up the narrative thread ending in the nineteenth century and beginning anew in the twentieth century. I will show that counter to the misleading, harmonious compromise apparently evidenced (and in a sense obviated by) in the work of Verdaguer, class struggle and divisions in class cultures in Catalonia characterized the nation. These divisions persist, despite a notion in the literary works of nationalists that belonging to Catalonia and speaking Catalan must naturally cause one to embrace the goals of the Catalanist movement. Instead, what I will show in the next section—which will then set the stage to show that literary nationalism in Catalonia had the paradoxical effect of encouraging criticism of the nation as well as helping to construct the nation, following the aforementioned equation of “making art=making pàtria”—what I will show is that it is impossible to distill national identity without the involvement of all the different classes and cultures of a nation. For without this, national identity often ends up being a cipher for the interests or goals of a select, elite group. What will instead become apparent is the divide between the lower classes’ conceptions of themselves as Catalans and the bourgeoisie’s conception of Catalanism as a political tact. That is, each group used and defined Catalan identity to slightly different ends, each in service of class goals.

**Chapter III: Class and culture in microcosmic, *fin-de-siècle* Barcelona: narrative dissonance**

Naturally, we must first investigate the heterogeneity of the nation to demonstrate its internal conflicts and contradictions that are later played out in narratives, the site for the construction (as in the work of Verdaguer) of the nation and the potential for its critique. In this section, then, what I hope to show how groups beyond the bourgeoisie deployed Catalan identity as a political tool at the turn of the century. Indeed, national identity gradually, though not immediately, came to be associated with class identity because of the roots of Catalanism in the urban, formerly agrarian bourgeoisie. The corollary of this is that lower class speakers of Catalan might still identify with national identity on a *personal* but not *political* level. The perceived exclusion of the working classes from a bourgeois Catalan identity, then, will provide Catalan writers later on in the century during the Franco period with a reason to criticize the nationalist movement while still “imagining” the nation through writing.

I will begin the task of complicating the notion of the unity of Catalan nationalism by looking at Barcelona, capital of Catalonia, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when the nascent sense of Catalan national identity comes to be challenged as a response to the crises affecting the Spanish state as a whole. These crises strained the relationship between the bourgeoisie and working classes of the city leading the former to embrace more fully *catalanisme* and the latter to grow wary of a Catalanist-oriented political ideology. The most salient and deleterious crisis, of course, is the loss of Spanish colonial holdings in 1898 as both a consequence of war and changing global political modes.



Before this cataclysm occurred, some connections between the Catalanist cultural movement and the working classes formed, only to *later* become in the popular consciousness as antithetical due to the economic crises wrought by Spain's loss of its colonial holdings. As we learned in the first part of this essay, the Spanish state's attempts to centralize the nation through cultural policies such as universal education in Castilian fell short of abject, the corollary of which being that many Catalan workers in Barcelona around the turn of the twentieth century spoke Catalan not "necessarily because they were Catalanists but because they had been taught Castilian so poorly" (Smith 173). Though the renaissance of Catalan culture and language may be attributable to a self-conscious, industrial bourgeoisie, the Catalan bourgeoisie was certainly not the only group to consider Catalan its mother tongue. Let us explore the connections, then, between Catalan cultural identity and working-class politics before moving on to an examination of the rupture between the two. By exploring this chapter in Catalan politics, we might further complicate the notion of a unitary Catalanist ideology linked to identity and thus begin to demonstrate the possibility of using the novel, a heterogeneous and anti-holistic form, as a possible critique of the totalizing assumptions of the nation and nationalism, its authorizing ideology.

In the 1870s, following Spain's Glorious Revolution of 1868, a "strong federal republican movement burst on the scene in Catalonia... gaining strong backing in urban milieux amongst workers, artisans, shopkeepers and small-scale employers" (Smith 173). Significantly, this movement sought a fuller expression of the rights and autonomy of Catalonia through the ideology of decentralization. Moreover, concrete symbols of Catalan identity could be seen in mass demonstrations in the 1880s, a period when

*catalanisme* “widened its social base, especially amongst the urban middle and lower-middle classes” (Smith 173) who advocated for the protection of Catalan-manufactured textiles. During these demonstrations—which had the support of *Tres classes de vapor*, Catalonia’s largest trade union—workers could be seen wearing traditional Catalan attire, such as the traditional hat, the *barretina* (Smith 173). These moments in the history of labor and culture in Catalonia may seem to be extraneous pieces of information about the cultural affinities of workers on the cusp of the twentieth century. But what these reflections evidence is the mutability of political ideology as it relates to the channel through which political consciousness is fueled. That is, nationalism and its privileging of the nation-state model may draw upon whatever cultural currents are available at a given moment in the evolution of a fledgling state. Thus, the working classes of Catalonia, though not essentially anti-Catalanist before the onset of the twentieth century, afterwards do not sympathize with an ideology that seems to seek as its logical end the creation of a bourgeois state at odds with the interests of labor both domestically and internationally. Cultural identity is often a guise under which the process of nationalization operates, but this kind of self-consciousness does not categorically exclude the overlapping of class and cultural identity. This conclusion will become clearer in my analysis of Mercè Rodoreda’s *Camellia Street*.

Beginning in the 1880s, however, the growth of a conservative Catalanist cultural nationalism and the exacerbation of inter-class conflict in Barcelona would effectively hasten the aforementioned rupture between a sense of cultural identity and class. Spain’s losses in the Spanish-American war of 1898, resulting in the loss of the nation’s colonial holdings, effectively weakened the commercial viability of the Catalan middle classes,

provoking widespread discontent among the urban bourgeoisie. Because of the bourgeoisie's precariousness and the weak integration of this latter into the central Spanish state, conservative parties with a strong Catalanist bent such as the *Lliga regionalista* (Regional League) gained a significant following after 1901 (Smith 175). The attraction of the Catalan bourgeoisie to a more Right-leaning political ideology that as has been noted took as its basis a particular interpretation of Catalan identity and culture seemed to cause the working classes of Barcelona to become less sympathetic to Catalanist thought and presentation. The analogue in the working classes that corresponds to the bourgeoisie's shift rightward is the growing popularity of the anarcho-sindicalist movement in Barcelona after the turn of the twentieth century. A movement, in fact, that would become anti-Catalanist, "identifying in the press a confluence between Catalanism and 'bourgeois interests'" (Smith 176). (Actually, the identification of Catalanism (both political and cultural) with a manipulative, urban bourgeoisie, which has come to seem almost a commonplace in modern Spain, has its roots in a sort of *fin-de-siècle* war-of-words between rival leftist and conservative presses in Barcelona (Smith).)

As the bourgeoisie embraced political Catalanism as the official ideology for a nascent nation, the working classes moved toward universal humanism. Early twentieth-century socialists called for laborers to rally around a "'universal brotherhood' of the working class" (Smith 178) and anarchists advocated belonging to similarly broad collectives. For the most part, anarchist and socialist spokespersons advocated for a single, universal language in order to erase class boundaries and structures, although a handful of socialist leaders advocated for universal education in Castilian. Between 1906 and 1907, however, the *Solidaritat Catalana* campaign represented the only true

interclass expression of Catalanism until the post-civil war period (Smith 183). More working class Catalans gravitated toward this labor movement possessing Catalanist messages due to the fracturing of the republican left in Barcelona, which had begun to promulgate a fiercely “anti-Vaticanist” and anti-clerical stance, a posture abrasive to the Catholic proletariat.

Culturally, the fractured sense of national identity in Catalonia, exemplified by the working class’s rejection of political Catalanism due to its being embraced by the bourgeoisie, is played out within the different *barrios* of Barcelona. As Anderson reminds us, the roots of nationalism are cultural, linked to and conditioned by a physically limited space. Tellingly, as the case of Barcelona demonstrates, a single place to which are ascribed various traits and almost human- or godlike characteristics (as in Verdaguer’s epic poems) is as much defined by the lack of a consistent, pervasive meaning as it is by the continually contested meanings proffered by competing political interests—in fact, each seems to presuppose the other. Thus, thinking of Barcelona between 1898 and 1936 as a large-scale, physical novel, legible in part only to the historian (a kind of fiction-writer), we begin to better understand Bakhtin’s theory of the novel as a site of endlessly criss-crossing meanings and values that I will explain in the following section. The actors of this grand drama of course include, but are not limited to, the bourgeoisie and the working class, both of which negate or affirm the highly charged but ultimately meaningless signification carried by the symbols of Catalan identity. Let us explore a few of the intricacies of this cultural feud.

For one, Barcelona was and is a city physically divided along class lines. The “port district of the Barceloneta, the fifth district on the left of the *Ramblas*, and outlying

districts such as Clot, Sant Marti, Sants and Hostafrancs” belonged to the working classes and the Old Quarter served as the home of the elites (Smith 185). In middle-class sectors of the city, home to the burgeoning nationalist movement, the lack of economic diversity became manifest through the gradual supremacy of Catalan culture—or the bourgeoisie’s idea of this. Assuming the place of more modern trends in dance, dress, and music arriving in the Iberian Peninsula from France, Great Britain, and the United States, the middle-class neighborhoods of Barcelona adopted “traditional rural folk songs and the popular rural dance...the *sardana*,” which became the national dance (Smith 185). The self-conscious practice of traditional, rural folk dances and music is reminiscent of the *Canigó* of Verdaguer, in which the author turns the peasant origins of the industrial bourgeoisie into a kind of national creation myth. By dancing the *sardana*, the urban Catalan nationalist is reasserting her country’s claim to nationhood while paradoxically existing outside of the tradition—rural peasant life—that forms the basis for this very assertion.

But national myth rarely corresponds to a reality teeming with contradictions, ambiguities, disparities. The city, much in the way of the novel thought of as a microcosm of the nation, offers us this swarming difference, complicating notions of unity under a common philosophy or identity. For one thing, Barcelona between the early twentieth century and the Civil War had a heterogeneous composition a fourth of which hailed from other regions of Spain. These immigrants, mostly laborers, and the Catalan working classes had different tastes in entertainment and culture than the Catalan middle classes. Whereas the Catalan nationalists preferred the *sardana* and folk music, the working classes of Barcelona danced the night away to flamenco, the zarzuela, or the

cuplé (Smith 186). (Bullfighting was also a popular pastime among workers, a historically charged taste as evidenced by the recent ban on bullfighting in Catalonia.) In the words of Emili Salut, “the working class was never interested in a Catalanism too full of traditions, the *Jocs Florals*, the Virgin of Montserrat and a poetic folklore which so contrasted with the prosaic business of the rich industrialists” (quoted in Smith 186).

If Verdaguer is the poet of a rapidly modernizing Catalonia whose peasant roots are not too far removed from the present, Joan Salvat-Papasseit is the avant-garde poet of the Catalan working class. According to David Rosenthal, the American translator who brought new attention to Catalan literature in the second half of the twentieth century, “Salvat-Papasseit is one of the few Catalan poets with a working class background” (31). Salvat-Papasseit, in addition to poet, listed for vocation radical, revolutionary essayist, whose influences included Gorky and Nietzsche. Later, in 1920, under the influence of the Futurists, Salvat-Papasseit called for the renovation of the Catalan-language avant-garde in the essay “Contra els poetes amb minúscula—primer manifest català futurista”<sup>16</sup> (*Escriptors en Llengua catalana*).

The poetry of Joan Salvat-Papasseit, a working-class Catalan, illustrates the divide between a Catalan middle class caught up in the self-conscious preservation of traditional culture and a culturally porous working class that seemed to absorb modern poetic forms, music, and even the minutiae of an increasingly capitalist urbanity, such as neon signs and theatre marquees. Many of Salvat-Papasseit’s poems imitate these commercial forms in the placement of the words on the pages themselves (a technique

---

<sup>16</sup> “Against poets with Lower-case ‘p’: the first Catalan Futurist manifesto.”—Translation mine.

known as the calligram, whose most famous practitioner was the French Guillaume Apollinaire, an influence on Salvat-Papasseit), mirroring the contours of the modern city, but giving them at the same time a socialist and Catalanist bent. His relation to the other writers explored in this essay (Verdaguer and Rodoreda) can be seen in his ability to draw the map of the nation, to imagine the nation aesthetically. And Salvat-Papasseit's portion of Catalonia is Barceloneta, "a neighborhood of fishermen and small artisans that faces the Mediterranean" (Rosenthal 31). He recreates this largely working class world and its "detailed texture of everyday existence" in his Catalan-language calligrams, a cutting edge form that often functions in his poetry as a map of the psycho-geography of a working-class Catalonia. Consonant with what I demonstrated earlier about the cultural traditionalism of the Barcelona bourgeoisie, Salvat-Papasseit essentially attempts to reconcile Catalan expression and thought with modernity, effectively offering an alternative to the conscious traditionalism of Catalan nationalism as it was perceived by the working classes during the early twentieth century.

Take, for instance, his calligram "Map," a careful assortment of politically significant places and groups such as the "AVENTINE MOUNT," the site of the founding myth of Rome (see Virgil's *Aeneid*; Salvat-Papasseit 34). This is particularly relevant to the current study, as we have already seen how Verdaguer appropriates foundational myths of classical antiquity for the purposes of, in a sense, *retroactively founding* Catalonia. Salvat-Papasseit's poem, in effect, can be read as an ironic dialogue with Verdaguer, who, looking to a mythical past, ignores the urban modern present, which is decidedly less beautiful and idyllic than what Bakhtin would call a "past closed to interpretation." Instead, in "Map," the reader sees the "DECADENCE" of

“CHURCHES” and “COTTAGES”; the reader intuitively Salvat-Papasseit’s contempt for the “VICE” of the “ARISTOCRACY,” which words are positioned together but not linked by anything more than the interpretive work of the reader (Salvat-Papasseit 34). Barcelona’s urban wasteland also includes suburbs, “POOR WHORES,” and both honesty and hunger (Salvat-Papasseit 34). This vision of urban modernity is illuminated by the sun, which “ignites everything / —without consuming it” (Salvat-Papasseit 34). This concluding line of the poem is particularly significant, as it suggests a divide between the life of the nation, a construct that requires the Verdaguer-like mystification of history, and nature, a species of metaphor for unknowable reality. This is to say, “Map” proposes that there is nothing so natural about urban modernity. Modernity is, like the various ideologies (nationalist or otherwise) that authorize its existence, an intentional product of thought and fictionalization, not the work of the divine or a natural outcome of history.

In the ultimate section, I will explore the closely related critique of the naturalness or even adequacy of modernity incarnated in bourgeois nationalism performed in the novel *Camellia Street* of Merce Rodoreda. Before this, I will show why the novel is an ideal site for the critique of the assumptions of nationalism (i.e., the “unitariness” of thought and identity as they are grouped under a single nationalist ideology) with an exploration of the thought of Brennan, Anderson, Bakhtin, and Lukács regarding the novel and its rupture with aesthetically pre-modern forms, such as the epic poem.



#### **Chapter IV: Novel Representations: The nation, the novel, and time and space**

Having finished my analysis of nineteenth-century Iberian nationalist sentiments (particularly in relation to history and literary texts) and of the complication of these identities in the twentieth century, I now shift my focus to a more modern form of representation: the novel. This chapter aims to offer an understanding of the consequences of the novel in view of both its usage as both a way of literally *constructing* the nation and its simultaneous capacity as an anti- or counter-nationalist act (or, at the least, a critique of the principles that underpin a particular class-based vision of the nation). Specifically, what is of import to the “Catalonian question” is how the novel, a peculiarly European phenomenon that is coeval with the nation itself, mimics the “imaginedness” of the nation, allowing individuals not connected in the slightest, while at the same presenting an essentially critical and unflinching examination of national “reality,” two functions that would seem to be in conflict with one another. I turn first to the question of the novel’s privileged position as a prism through which to envision the nation and oneself within it before then showing the critical capacities of the novel.

Timothy Brennan posits that the novel both mimics the nation and helps to invent it. For one, it is the novel (rather than the poem or the folktale) that exemplifies the “one, yet many” nature of the nation, since the novel strives to create a “bordered jumble of languages and styles” that correspond to the heterogeneity of the nation (Brennan 49). Important among these varied languages and styles of expression are the two poles of “high” and “low” address, signifying the novel’s (and the nation’s) ability to solder together the lower and upper classes of a country. In other words, the novel, an extension of the nation’s essentially democratic treatment of the lower classes, becomes a demotic

form, not only expressing *Volksgeist* through the presentation of a wide range of linguistic registers but also transforming the individual into a potential unit of study. In this way, the novel came to be seen as the most direct and authentic expression of the workings of a national consciousness, linked to the lives and ways of speaking of the common people. But the modern nation obviously contains many more nuances beyond the composition of its body, heterogeneous or not. In the next paragraphs, I turn to Anderson's analysis of national time and space in the novel before discussing the theories of Lukács and Bakhtin.

It is worth recapitulating a few of Anderson's key arguments in order to situate us within the political context that gives rise to the novel as a politically useful vehicle. Anderson counterpoises the nation to older religious social organizations, imaginary communities in their own right, such as Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the Middle Kingdom (Anderson 12). The element shared among these societies constructed upon religious fundament is the centrality of language as that which gives authentic meaning and legitimacy to the rulers (those who know how to rule according to the faith's dictates) and their actions. For this primacy of the written, canonical word, superior to the bastardized vernaculars for its ability to express immutable truth, "the ideograms of Chinese, Latin, or Arabic were emanations of reality, not randomly fabricated representations of it" (Anderson 14). Having noted in the previous chapter the shift in the ability to legitimate reality through the word from ecclesiastical authority to secular, modern, national authority (best exemplified by institutions such as the *Real academia española*), it is easier to see the point of the comparison between the religious community and the secular nation. The nation and the strata of peoples that it

encompasses create meaning on the basis of a standard manner of speaking, writing, and, consequently, thinking.

Moreover, the novel provides an analogue to a conception of time unique to the nation, time that is, as Walter Benjamin writes, “‘homogenous, empty time,’ in which simultaneity is...transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (Anderson 24). It is this conception of time that allows two people, say, in a Balzac novel connected to one another through a shared lover to remain complete strangers but still be cognizant of one another’s occupation of the same social-temporal space, subject to the same vagaries of the nation as it moves “steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 26). Additionally, the reader of the novel occupies the same time and space as the writer of the novel, signifying a fusion of the internal novel world with external reality, which fusion enables the reader to envision herself as a single point in a continuity of like points that constitute an entire community. And finally the novel, according to Anderson, generally treats space in the plural: *spaces*. That is, the hero of the archetypical novel moves through a “sociological landscape” (30) populated by fixtures of both the internal novel-world and external reality so that institutions such as the prison cease to be simply *a* prison but a typical prison, a prison that is similar to other prisons that exist within a nation (or a national imaginary).

On the subject of time and history in the novel, Bakhtin and Lukács both counterpoise the epic poem to the novel as one of the novel’s possible antecedents. Both thinkers work through the political consequences of the epic’s treatment of time and history (as a product of the same). Lukács positions the philosophy of the novel in a post-

enlightenment landscape in which, as opposed to the “national traditions” of epic poetry and myth, the “melancholy of the adult state” is produced through a harsh realization that reality is not pre-ordained by the gods, as it is in Verdaguer’s poems, that “the outside world to which we now devote ourselves in our desire to learn its ways and dominate it will never...clearly tell us our way or determine our goal” (Lukács 86). This contrasts with Verdaguer’s implied stance that the nation is a preordained form that may be apprehended through artistic and rational appreciation. If this is the modern context from which the novel derives meaning and shape as opposed to “already completed genres,” to borrow from Bakhtin’s terminology, then the epic represents a philosophy of history characterized by “fathers and of founders of families, a world of ‘firsts’ and ‘bests’” (Bakhtin 13). In the epic, the successions leading to the present are enshrouded and mystified by the gloss of aesthetics, of the stylization of how the distance between past and present is significant and, in most cases, a process of devolution. If we think about the epic in view of nationalism, we begin to see that it is a form well suited to the kind of mythologization of the origins of the nation on display in both of Verdaguer’s works. In them, as in other epics, time is “valorized”; the origins of the nation, which can be located in an “absolute past” necessarily impervious to modern interpretations, are thus providential (Bakhtin 15). The novel, then, as Lukács rightly states, is an ironic epic in a world without a God.

Because the novel melds high and low registers of speech, the demotic with the cultured, its philosophy is conditioned in turn by the particularity of its presentation of the subject through language. Unlike the novel, the epic relies upon traditionalism and in fact creates the limits and codes of traditional expression due to the deferential attitude

the epic singer takes respecting the past. For this (that is, the truth of an absolute past whose value to the present is clearly defined), the language of the epic is not “separable from the subject, for an absolute fusion of subject matter and spatial-temporal aspects with valorized (hierarchical) ones” (Bakhtin 17). Because of the fusion of a pre-ordained, providential reality with the heroic quest of the epic protagonist, there occurs a concomitant combining of the external and internal worlds of the protagonist. The political implications of this are again clear: there is an inherent inability to reflect critically on the present if truth is expressed as a distant, past, and fixed entity knowable only through a traditional lexicon. The protagonist of the novel, then, experiences the “adventure of interiority” (Lukács 89), or the process by which the subjective ideal of the protagonist is disabused by the “objective and extensive reality of the world” (Lukács 89).

The novel also eschews the notion of the “completeness” of the present. The completeness of the past in absolute time, the time in which live nationalists, is manifest in any one of the parts that comprise the whole of an epic work, given the essential character of all or any acts or situations within absolute time’s scope. Thus, *Don Quijote* must be in itself a truthful expression of Spanishness; and thus the Canigou mountain must be one among many authentic expressions of *catalanidad*. In the novel, on the other hand, the obliteration of absolute time augurs the abolition of the completeness or immutability of an event, an historical period, or a political project. In Bakhtin’s formulation, “the present is something transitory, it is flow, it is an eternal continuation without beginning or end; it is denied an authentic conclusiveness and consequently lacks an essence as well” (20). The political significance of the novel’s conceptualization of the

present as an “eternal continuation” becomes clear if we look again at the valorized, hierarchical time of the epic, in which the beginning is the only point that can maintain value: a nation’s founding, especially if providential, is crystallized and cannot be reevaluated. Conversely, the novel engages in an “eternal re-thinking and re-evaluating” (31) of the present and the future.

The corollary of the capacity for eternal re-evaluation characterized by the novel connects back to the shrinking of the gap between the time in which the author (or reader) writes his or her work and the time in which the work’s drama unfolds. Absolute time is in some ways dictatorial. In it there is distance between writer/reader and subject. Novelistic time, time that allows for engagement with rather than submission to the present, pushes the author/reader into the world of the fiction. Brennan’s analysis of the shared temporal space of the novel intuits that this interactivity is essential both to imagining as well as *unimagining* the nation. Though the range of characters within the nation may be present in the novel, it is the engagement of the author (and the reader) with these characters or ideologies or situations that has the potential to undo the supposed permanence of these latter.

One critical tool, we might say, that the novel popularized is the use of laughter to destroy hierarchical, temporal distance between subjects, between author/reader and that which is represented. Lukács characterizes the drama of the novel occurring as a result of the clash between an exterior, physical reality in which the protagonist moves and the interior, imaginative world of an idealistic protagonist (and the protagonist is naturally an ideologue, according to Bakhtin). (*Don Quijote* is for this reason the prime example of the essential novelistic conflict.) Bakhtin makes clearer the comedic value of this explicit

exposure of the protagonist's inner being that is "the disparity between his surface and his center, between his potential and his reality" (35). What is more, the collapsing of the distance between author/reader and subject has the effect of desecrating all that was once held untouchable under a regime of absolute time. In the novel, the relentlessly critical potential of the narrator is able to lay bare the ideological precepts of a given reality and thusly expose its artifice. One need only think of the humorlessness of nationalist art to see this principle in function. The poems of Verdaguer, for example, though well-constructed and often very beautiful, suffer from an inability to *laugh* at their subjects, a precondition for recognizing their mutability or recognizing that they may not be divine, naturally produced objects.

And finally we come to a characteristic of the novel that is less a critical tool than an irrevocable condition that distinguishes the form from poetry or the epic, which characteristic Bakhtin refers to as "heteroglossia," literally the heterogeneity of speech forms that the novel proffers, knowingly or not. Bakhtin's theorization of heteroglossia finds its analogue in the Anderson's work, though perhaps articulated less clearly. Anderson, for one, suggests that the novel is a uniquely national form due to its ability to encapsulate the diversity of speech forms, each of which correspond to a distinct yet interconnected social-economic reality, allowing the reader of the novel to imagine her connection to one of her fellow citizens irrespective to the lack of any meaningful, non-abstract relationship between the two. It is Bakhtin's contribution (made before that of Anderson) to further suggest that heteroglossia exists in opposition to (or in contradiction of) state-driven efforts that "*serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world*" (Bakhtin 270). If, as we have seen and will see again, nationalisms call for the unification

and standardization of a common language, thus serving as the referent for legitimacy and truth as apprehended through language within and without the nation, then heteroglossia must challenge in some way the unitary vision of “*nation-ness*.” That is, because there exist many linguistic and symbolic registers within a single nation whose people possess a common tongue, the notion that artistic expression in that language must necessarily be the sole symbolic register is mistaken. Take, for instance, Verdaguer’s epics, which idealize the peasantry as possessing the “spiritual reserve” of the modern nation, despite the fact that these peasants do not speak for themselves in the epic. If they were to speak, would they have something different to say than what the Catholic Verdaguer writes about the nation? Perhaps. The point is that heteroglossia, which makes possible the novel and is on full display in it, enables the writer to express the various and contested meanings associated with a singular object that in the nationalist imaginary often possesses only one meaning. For this reason, Catalonia may mean one thing to one character in a novel and something else to another, mirroring the external political debates that inform the internal content and structure of the novel.

If we further explore this concept of heteroglossia using Bakhtin as our guide, a few conclusions will become apparent. One such conclusion relates to the novel’s capacity for dialogue, understood in the Bakhtinian sense as a “constant interaction between meanings” (Bakhtin 426) that are rendered unstable because of the precondition of heteroglossia. That is, all living words and symbols compose a web of contested meanings that corresponds to a particular “socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of utterance” (Bakhtin 276). Thus, the possibility that a word (or its corresponding object) might express “unmediated intention” is “impermissibly naïve”



(Bakhtin 278) and is shown to be so in the novel, wherein the irremediable Tower-of-Babel character of a given society is articulated precisely through these contradictory, concentric, and contested terrains of expression. What is more,

the prose writer confronts a multitude of routes, roads, and paths that have been laid down in the object by social consciousness. Along with the internal contradictions inside the object itself, the prose writer witnesses as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia *surrounding* the object (Bakhtin 278).

This will become all the more apparent in my analysis of *Camellia Street* of Mercè Rodoreda, the premier Catalan novelist of the twentieth century whose work has been variously used in support of a strong sense of Catalan national identity despite the cautions that her oeuvre deploys against bourgeois nationalism and its consequent social consciousnesses. This is accomplished through the heteroglossia of her work in relation to itself and to the external reality to which it refers, accomplished through the dialogue of different literary tropes, images, and linguistic registers. What is at stake, of course, in contesting these seemingly fixed meanings conveyed by words, which seem all the more fixed in an atmosphere of a culture striving for unification, is the paradoxical ability of language (and its artistic expressions) to deconstruct or challenge representations or conceptions of a unitary reality promulgated by the state.

A few corollaries may be deduced from the above reflections on Bakhtin, Lukács, and Anderson. One, the novel enables its reader to *envision* the nation in its abstract wholeness. Though the reader may not see her socio-ideological consciousness or economic station reflected in the novel, it still connects her to the nation in two important ways: she is imagining the *same physical* nation as others who are reading the *same* novel

(a kind of simultaneous connection), and additionally is observing the drama or plot of the nation as the narrative unfolds. Obviously, then, the novel at one time reproduces an image of the nation as a narrative, unfolding across time and space, a narrative that encapsulates several distinct persons connected by a grand but necessary abstraction. This reproduction, however, does not necessarily signal the reproduction of nationalistic—that is, unitary or totalizing—ideologies, though they are almost certainly present within the text and gestured to by the very same. Instead, as Lukács and Bakhtin point out, the humorous and often sarcastic character of the novel enables it to scratch away at the facades of such seemingly total institutions or ways of thinking, such as nationalist consciousness and ideology. What is more, the “eternal re-thinking and re-evaluating” of reality that is the novel’s primary trait, coupled with the heteroglossic (or polyphonic) representations of the substrata of a given nation, equips the novel (and its readers) to confront the contradictions that inhere in the composition of the nation and the self-conscious ideologies that prop it up. In short, despite the abuses and misuses of the novel that may be perpetrated by ideologues intent on novelizing and proselytizing, the novel as a form more frequently resists such facile, totalizing readings of reality, national or not.

## Chapter V: The works of Mercè Rodoreda as constructive deconstructions

### *The role of the intellectual and the writer in post-Civil War Catalonia*

In the previous sections, I first attempted to complicate the idea of a unitary national identity, instead demonstrating the complex relationship of the Catalan people to a body of symbols and signs that would come to determine a “political” Catalan national identity. As the Barcelona bourgeoisie consciously embraced traditional symbols of Catalan culture, such as the *sardana* and outmoded artistic and linguistic forms, the working classes moved towards more modern cultural practices. Because of the contradictions or complexities characteristic of a given national territory, it may be reasonably said that the novel, an artistic form given to polyphony and thus contradiction and overlap, as an artistic form closely resembles the linguistic and symbolic diversity particular to a nation. Anderson, Lukács, and Bakhtin all say more or less the same thing in this regard: “the novel reflects the struggle between the official standardized language promoted by the established power and the multiple social and geographical variants, characterized by their heterogeneity” (Cornella-Detrell 15). Because every linguistic register is attached to a corresponding, often unspoken symbol, the novel treats difference in linguistic registers through an examination of these same symbols. The novel, then, seeks to reproduce that key aspect of national life—namely, the plurality of difference diffused across classes and geographies, which are often intertwined or mutually conditioning.

But, in the Catalan case, what is most interesting is the twofold difference that is present in readings of the novel and the nation. That is, because Castilian and Catalan have vied for supremacy in the region for hundreds of years, the Catalan novelist has a

choice to make regarding the language in which she is to express herself and her perceived nation. As we have already seen, writing in Catalan in the nineteenth century came to be viewed as (and in fact was and is) a political act, one that went against the supremacy of the Spanish central state in favor of expanding the rights of ethno-linguistic minorities in the Iberian Peninsula; making art signified (and signifies) the making of the *pàtria*, a conclusion reiterated by Cornella-Detrell. The position, then, of the Catalan intellectual in the mid-twentieth century becomes more complex as a result of this heteroglossia that is both linked to the Catalan nation and not. For one thing, because *Catalanism* comes to be associated with an urban bourgeoisie, so writing in that language is seen as an act of allegiance to bourgeois causes (such as the centralization of a potential autonomous state of Catalonia). But, identification with the bourgeoisie is not the only political association made by expressing oneself in the language. Catalan intellectuals writing in Catalan, because of the persecution of the language during Franco's dictatorship, were and are also, whether consciously or not, writing against the ban, or what specialists call *linguicide*, of their own language, making the act of writing doubly political. Within this highly charged ambit wrote Mercè Rodoreda, whose novel *Camellia Street* I will analyze in the next section to illustrate the paradoxical ability of the novel to both construct and deconstruct the nation on the same page.

Between the conclusion of chapter III and this chapter, the Spanish Civil War has devastated the fledgling nation, having destroyed the best intentions of the Second Republic to modernize Spain based on liberal principles such as universal education, the curtailing of religious and aristocratic privileges, and the division of the power vested in the church and the state (Casanovas Gil Andrés). In 1939, the Civil War came to an end,

leaving some 500,000 in casualties, hundreds of thousands of Spaniards with republican sympathies in exile, and tens of thousands more persecuted and tortured by the ultra-conservative, ultra-Catholic dictatorship of Francisco Franco. All efforts during the Second Spanish Republic to protect the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Iberian Peninsula and its peoples were rolled back as part of the dictatorship's determination to "eradicate all signs of cultural and political diversity on the grounds that pluralism was a threat to the unity of Spain" (Cornella-Detrell 2). Castilian became known as "*cristiano*" in reference to the supposedly divine character of the auspices under which Franco assumed and wielded power. Here again we see the nationalist trope that the language of power, in this case Castilian, is the authentic expression of the essential national self, insinuating that other impure, demotic tongues are "outside of" history. This idea of Catalan being outside of history does not require long explication, as public signs printed in Spanish during the dictatorship often read "*Habla la lengua del Imperio español*," suggesting that Catalan is weak or febrile in comparison with the power of Spanish. Moreover, Catalan was denounced as being the language of beasts, as evinced by the slogan "*¡No ladres!*," a censure meaning "don't bark!" In short, the public usage of Catalan, Basque, Galician, and the Peninsula's other non-Castilian minority languages were not just banned but persecuted, and the publishing markets in these languages that had begun before the war were quashed.

The linguistic situation in Spain remained dire until the 50s and 60s, when the Franco dictatorship began responding to pressures from other Western countries that would temper some of the extremes of the dictatorship. In the 60s,

living conditions in Spain had improved visibly as a consequence of steady economic growth and the country's increasing exposure to Europe and to foreign investment, which to some extent forced the dictatorship to abandon some of its more repressive policies (Cornella-Detrell 3).

Jordi Cornella-Detrell's marvelous account of the publishing industry in Catalonia before and after the dictatorship gives a good idea of the prevalence of cultural expression in Catalan:

in 1936, 865 books were published in Catalan; in 1944, only 5. During the 1950s advances were very slow, from 43 books in 1950 to 183 in 1960. The real turning point was 1962 (270 books); from then on, increases were gradual (368, 1964; 548, 1966)... (3).

The 60s also gave rise to several regional literary magazines, like the *Serra d'Or*, and important cultural foundations, like the *Omnium cultural*, both of which were motivated by the explicit purpose of rescuing the Catalan language from extinction (Crameri 24-5).

Extrapolating from these facts and figures, it is reasonable to suggest that cultural production in Catalan, though not always or even often commercially viable, represented to the intelligentsia that the production of these works was more an act of political consciousness than a simple expression of the private self. This is the thesis advanced by both Kathryn Crameri and Jordi Cornella-Detrell to make sense of the Catalan author's choice to publish in her native tongue. Joan Fuster, a Valencian intellectual and critic, writes that, in reference to the "high literary" work of poet Carles Riba, "La llengua catalana no tenia altra salvació que la seva literatura" (Crameri 24).<sup>17</sup> Crameri also writes, "It is evident...that...the very act of choosing to write in Catalan" is "a political

---

<sup>17</sup> "The Catalan language had no other salvation than its literature."—Translation mine.

Holter 69

statement which then allies the writer with Catalan nationalism” (Crameri 53).<sup>18</sup> And if during the nineteenth century making art was considered a nationally productive act, the twentieth-century Catalan intelligentsia embraced this formula more wholeheartedly than ever, having only narrowly dodged extinction. It is obvious, then, that because of the mold of creative production inherited from the nineteenth century of Catalan-language production, in which making art was tantamount to “making the *pàtria*,” and because of the persecuted nature of the Catalan language, Catalan writers could not escape from being forcibly included into the Catalan literary canon, even if their works contained critically subversive or anti-nationalist (though perhaps not anti-nation) content.

This “politicization of literary issues,” as Crameri puts it, which is endemic in the era of late- and post-Francoism, is perpetuated by intellectuals, *both* Catalan and not. Take, for example, the Autonomous Government of Catalonia’s decision in 2002 to award American literary critic Harold Bloom the “14<sup>th</sup> International Catalonia Prize,” a prize that according to one of the foremost Catalan novelists Baltasar Porcel reflects Catalonia’s ““identity, our being,”” which ““is based on culture, reflection, intelligence, language”” (Daly). Porcel adds: ““Bloom fits in perfectly with our fundamental concerns”” (Daly). The award and its ceremony, both obvious nationalist symbols created to promote and demonstrate the vivacity of Catalan culture and the nation’s corresponding political import and legitimacy, could not have picked a better honoree than Bloom, whose concept of the literary canon resonates with the nationalist concerns

---

<sup>18</sup> Certain Catalan writers such as Biel Mesquida who published after the dictatorship’s waning consciously rejected this assumption, instead reasserting the inherently individual nature of writing itself and arguing that this position also posits nationalism as a limit that may not be “transgressed” (Crameri 53).

of the contemporary and former Catalan intelligentsia. In Bloom's estimation, those vernacular languages boasting of strong literary and artistic production coincident with the history of the development of the modern nation-state in Western Europe (a pattern already explored in the previous sections through the theories of Benedict Anderson) are deserving of "political independence." See Bloom's commentary on this relationship between national being and literary production made at a conference on Ramon Llull: "“Si fuera catalán, me gustaría que mi país se independizara de España””<sup>19</sup> (Edicion Espana). This is all to say that more than 100 years beyond the *Renaixença catalana* of the nineteenth century, language-based art still seems to equal the health and viability of the nation.

Of course, given the precariousness of Catalan and its corresponding identities, it would seem that the intelligentsia and literati would be unified in solidarity against the Franco dictatorship. But Catalan writers and critics actively and openly, in the few Catalan-language presses in operation at the time, questioned the role of literature in shaping broader politico-linguistic trends and attitudes within the region. That is, far from relying on a specific, inherited form of Catalan to produce novels, poems, and essays, a form that did not exist, the intelligentsia was forced to strike a balance between the vernacular and the self-consciously literary<sup>20</sup> on the page, a balance which was thought to have wider repercussions for the language's continued existence. In part, this balancing act occurred of necessity, since education in Catalan was clandestine or a luxury of the

---

<sup>19</sup> "If I were Catalan, I would want my nation to secede from Spain."—Translation Mine.

<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Joan Salvat-Papasseit seems an exemplary, nearly visionary figure, an intellectual dramatizing the conflict between an autochthonous dialect rooted in life on the one hand and, on the other, a carefully crafted revision of the same linguistic arena.



elites and bourgeoisie, meaning that the number of people with the ability to use a more formal, professional variety of Catalan was miniscule. Again, the intelligentsia, alienated from the bourgeois mantra of art-for-art's-sake, consciously theorized the role that Catalan language would have in literary production so that in some sense art would make and save the nation.

But years of linguistic and political repression by the Castilian-speaking Spanish elite in Madrid could not help but have important consequences for Catalan speakers during the mid-twentieth century. In contrast with the nineteenth century, post-Civil War Catalan speakers were now preoccupied with the efficacy of the language in which texts were written and with the purpose of promoting a standard form of Catalan. That is, because Franco had effectively undermined popular belief in the political and cultural usefulness and independence of Catalan, going so far as to claim that it is an “artificial means of expression that had been fabricated by Pompeu Fabra,” Catalan intellectuals were tasked with finding a form of Catalan that would faithfully reproduce popular, perhaps uneducated speech and at the same time restore the language’s prestige within its home region (Cornella-Detrell 34).

And though it is certainly a fallacy that Catalan was somehow an artificial product cooked up by a conspiratorial group of bourgeois grammarians more akin to something from a Borges story than to the reality of linguistic codification, Pompeu Fabra’s Catalan grammar is a nationalist text insofar as it seeks to “purify” the language from Castilian influences, as well as operating upon the logic of *Volksgeist* or the idea that language is somehow the authentic or essential expression of the national self. This “purification,” of course, relied on a high degree of control of written texts, for these are much easier to

“correct[...] and free[...] from Spanish loan words”; but “spontaneous interaction was much more difficult to control” (Cornella-Detrell 36). Obviously, the nationalist concern with linguistic “purity” and as a consequence the purity of the self is met with a concomitant emphasis on the correction of literary and non-literary texts alike, for only on the page can the nation be created or recreated along certain desired terms. The curious paradox here, then, is that despite the Romantic belief in language as the *Volksgeist* of the people, nationalist grammarians would police the speech of the people to ensure, as it were, that their *Geist* was sufficiently Catalan. This is a clear demonstration at once of the plasticity of language *and* its strange ability to convince others of its fixedness.

As should be evident from other national histories, emphases on the purity of culture often imply a conservatism of thought and vision that in turn is a symptom of political power. Take, for example, the conservatism of certain Catalan language experts who “turned their attention to medieval literature and configured a corpus of equivalent terms listed in a great number of glossaries and language treaties,” rejecting instances of syntax deemed too similar to Catalan’s closest neighbor, Castilian (Cornella-Detrell 36). Though the hunt for the adequate, autochthonous expression in the annals of the region’s history may seem empty of bias, consider the similarity common to this pursuit for authenticity of the origins of the language when “Catalonia’s political and cultural power was at its peak and the language had not yet deviated from its ‘natural’ path” *and* to the epic poem’s symptomatic enshrinement of the past resulting in an unchallengeable Golden Age (Cornella-Detrell 36). In short, institutionally crafted linguistic purity, though driven by the noble intent of saving a living language not from extinction but

from being *executed*, only reinforces the founding myths of a nation that may belie the imbrications of language and power.

The corollary of pruning Catalan of its deviant branches may become clearer the further we dive into the debates between the intelligentsia facing the question of linguistic purity and the novelist's commitment to her art. As we have seen already, the preoccupation of intellectuals with the authenticity of their language (Castilian serving as its foil or negative pole) resulted in a need for control over the writing process as governed by the needs of the incipient nation. Though the publishing industry in Catalonia was still relatively small throughout the 50s and 60s, it effectively exerted this control over Catalan writers through the common practice of having "*correctors*" (or proof-readers) amend artistic texts so that the language would be in keeping with the standard established (somewhat stilted and archaic) by Fabra. With these *correctors* working in unconscious conjunction with other intellectuals who strove to diminish the importance of questions pertaining to literary style, which was perceived as "a threat to both the cohesion of the cultural milieu and language recovery," literary culture was again in service of the national cause, this time, though, with the set of critical tools afforded by the novel discussed by Bakhtin, Anderson, and Lukács (Cornella-Detrell 40).

A minority group of writers—Merce Rodoreda, Joan Sales, Salvador Espriu, Xavier Benguerel, and Sebastià Juan Arbó—sought to think the relationship between the Catalan writer and her society differently. Instead of consciously adopting a "literary" style—a phrase that came to signify obeying the prescriptions of Fabra's grammar and the hegemony of the *correctors*—these writers believed that "spontaneous" utterances better or more accurately reflected the lives of those people their novels were meant to

represent; this is a clear example of Bakhtin's dialogism through heteroglossia, as these novelists were clearly in dialogue with the "standard" form of Catalan as opposed to the "Catalan of the people" (though such a division is not always tenable, as it is predicated on the Romantic logic of *Volksgeist* or the language of the people being the expression of the self) (Cornella-Detrell 51). That is, rigid conformity to an out-of-touch codex of rules would do less to help save their language from the brink of extinction and more to turn Catalan into even more of an elite-controlled language, one that is "literary" first and foremost. Moreover, this group of writers, save Rodoreda, believed that if the novelist could capture this spontaneity of everyday language, the novel would as a result be the fundament for the revival of a language-based culture. Of course, this position occupies the opposite extreme of that of the grammarians, for it is not solely through spoken language that a "standard" evolves. Rather, as Derrida suggests in *De la grammatologie*,

linguistic development can only occur through the interplay of speech and writing; both notions are deeply embedded in one another, because the former presupposes the existence of the latter and vice versa, and therefore neither of them can be assumed to be more central (Cornella-Detrell 56).

Obviously, then, the spontaneity of demotic speech, though seeming to possess a greater claim to truth and authenticity in the sense of *Volksgeist*, is also predetermined and susceptible to external influence as is language that is codified in dictionaries and grammars. It is Rodoreda's accomplishment that she so deftly melds both extremes in her writing, exposing the paradox of the nationalist conception of language as an expression of the *Volksgeist* and in a sense the trajectory of the history of a nation.

So what is the position of the Catalan writer or intellectual in this environment?

Does the Catalan writer embrace nationalism as the unique mode of being in the world (which may actually mean writing the world)? Does she write in the Catalan vernacular, despite its association with the bourgeois nation? Or does she write in Catalan in protest of dictatorial repression and the predominance of Castilian? To say the least, the question of literary production is politicized. We will see in the next subsection that the works of Mercè Rodoreda effectively challenge and question many of these different ways of seeing the relationship between the political world and the art that is engendered by it and in turn makes its reproduction possible. It is through the analysis of Rodoreda's novel that I hope to show a few distinct things: One, that the novel is, more so than the historical epic or the epic poem, the literary form that is capable of reconstructing (and reproducing) the contours of the nation while also having the capacity to level against it criticism. Two, that the novel's heteroglossic engagement with language and the symbol itself further amplifies the critical capabilities of art as both the nation and its negation. Three, that the novel theorizes (and often deconstructs) national forms and modalities by engaging "life" as it is constructed linguistically by actors that don't serve as elites within the nation and thusly might in fact contradict the nation. Finally, throughout the next section, I will show that in accord with the preceding few paragraphs on the role of language in the literary culture of Catalonia during the 50s and 60s Rodoreda's work subjects nationalism to scrutiny through subtle commentaries on the artifice of language and its relation to power.

*The raw modernity of Barcelona: the flâneuse, the prostitute, and microhistory*

The above discussion brings us to an examination of *Camellia Street* of Mercè Rodoreda, which demonstrates the ambiguous ethos characteristic of the modern nation and the microcosm that is its metonym: the modern city. In our case, Catalonia, Barcelona is the city, the scene for one of the most memorable of Rodoreda's novels *El carrer de les Camèlies* (translated as *Camellia Street*). This novel is of interest in this discussion as it engages in dialogue with Catalonia's two premier artistic-cum-political modernisms that dominated the early twentieth century and set the standard for future Catalan intellectuals: *modernisme* and *noucentisme*. The former, led by a radical, Catalan-identifying intelligentsia, sought to remove from the nation's cultural tradition what they perceived to be "apolitical parochialism" by borrowing from hotbeds of European modernism such as Paris (Arkinstall 18). Nevertheless, anti-bourgeois *modernisme* was soon superseded by the *noucentistes*, who, "exalting an elitist bourgeois Catalunya symbolized by the 'ideal city'" of Barcelona, effectively embraced the conservatism of Catalonia's *Lliga regionalista* party (Arkinstall 19). Seeking to synthesize the cosmopolitanism of *modernisme* and its concomitant critique of bourgeois hypocrisy with the focus of *noucentisme* on strength in Catalan cultural identity, Rodoreda would write some of the most important novels in twentieth century Iberian letters. Her commitment, however, to the Catalan Left and the anti-Franco movement in letters would force her into years-long exile in France and Switzerland for alienating both the conservative bourgeoisie of Barcelona and the fascist central government.

This last detail goes to show Rodoreda's political bent both in and outside of her works. In fact, her "literary production consistently challenges the sociopolitical and cultural boundaries that impede the access of subaltern groups to the modernist

enterprise” (Arkinstall 21-22). Specifically, gender and class are both presented, precisely as in Bakhtin’s formulation, dialogically. That is, critical postures regarding modern nationalism are established through the interplay of linguistic, sartorial, and formal literary codes that not only shape but also incarnate certain characters in her novels. In this section of my analysis of *Camellia Street*, I will focus mainly on the dialogical meditations on the tropes of the *flâneur* and the prostitute, themselves stock figures within the DNA of the novel, with which Rodoreda toys to craft an ironic, highly critical vision of urban modernity and of the bourgeoisie.

*Camellia Street*, much in the way that Brennan and Anderson envision the novel as allowing the reader to visualize and take his place in the nation, lays bare the “sociological landscape” or space of the nation in its reproduction of Barcelona (Anderson 30). We are shown the famous Passeig de Gràcia and, on it, “a mansion with its back garden full of palm trees with fan-shaped leaves and big blue-and-white china pots” (Rodoreda, *Camellia* 26-27). We seem to sense Verdi Street, smelling of “burned leaves” (Rodoreda, *Camellia* 38). We see as the author-narrator drives down the Rambla de Catalunya “lime tree branches go by” (Rodoreda, *Camellia* 164). The geography of the nation is complemented by its roster of characters, such as Cosme, the bar owner with a gold tooth; Eusebi, the poor day laborer and partner of Cecília, the “fallen woman made good” who narrates the nation for us; and Martí, Cecília’s wealthy, older lover. And if this panoply of local color does not position the reader squarely in Barcelona, in the mid-twentieth century, then the subtle intrusion of the Spanish Civil War into the city firmly grounds us in a hyper-specific time and place. In accordance with the theories of Brennan and Anderson, Rodoreda is effectively narrating for the reader the nation, allowing the

members of that abstraction to imagine each other in relation to one another because of a common language (it is of course significant that all of Rodoreda's narrators are Catalans speaking Catalan) and forming a totality that is bound by geography. It is no accident, then, that Rodoreda ascribes to the denizens of this recreated world attributes that conflict with the purportedly egalitarian, democratic values of the bourgeois nation with which the novel is in dialogue.

But it is not the official, macro history (with capital H) of the nation that is the main focus of the novel, but rather "lo minúsculo" ("the minuscule"), the quotidian events of everyday life that give the novel shape and power (Navajas 848). Rodoreda spins her neo-picaresque tale of the travails of Cecília, abandoned as a child on Camellia Street, who passes through a series of strange, often abusive, and rarely rewarding relationships with a volatile cast of men. Cecilia's own narrative comprises small things and moments, such as sweeping or chatting, not valorized in the traditional forms of historical narrative or literary realism. As Gonzalo Navajas observes with respect to the marginality of many of the characters of the novel,

El texto orienta su afectividad hacia esos personajes a los que otorga la atención que los demás les han negado consistentemente y de ese modo pone de relieve su estima especial hacia lo aparentemente insignificante por encima de lo que es generalmente reconocido como más valioso (849).<sup>21</sup>

So, Rodoreda is essentially showing another stratum of the multifaceted nation, whose official history valorizes its various intellectual currents and peoples by choosing to

---

<sup>21</sup> "The text directs its affection toward those characters that have been consistently denied the attention of rest of the world and, by doing so, illuminates its special esteem for the apparently insignificant over what is generally considered more valuable."—Translation mine.



exclude or include them within the political community. On one level, then, Rodoreda's fiction in general operates as a species of metaphor that seeks to reclaim and valorize the importance of Catalonia within Spain during a time when it was subjugated and, even, humiliated by the dictatorship of Franco, who placed Catalonia and its language "outside" of the macrohistorical importance of the national project and identity. On another more regional level, Rodoreda may also be making the claim that Catalanism, as it ages and comes to need more popular support because of the repressions of Franco, must be more inclusive and pay attention to its own "miniscule" characters who are traditionally portrayed as being outside of history, characters such as the prostitute, the kept woman, or the housewife.

To further complicate the notion of a macrohistory and the corresponding concept of the unitary nation in which all possessors of a common tongue are in concert, I will examine the relational or dialogical symbolism of Cecília's narrative voice and her vocation as prostitute. I begin with her voice. Much like that of the other typically Rodoredan narrator of *The Time of the Doves*, her voice is like that of a child who is always in awe of or wonder at that which transpires around her. The simplicity of Cecília's delivery masks, despite its appearance of naivety and even its apparent lack of education, the virtuosity of Rodoreda's control of prose. The informal utterances of the narrator, who frequently relies upon the conjunction "and" to connect even the most disparate thoughts and often deploys clichés during moments of great gravity in the text, evinces Rodoreda's dialogue with the *correctors* of the Catalan publishing industry and the grammarians who both intended to universally impose temporally valorized codes of speech upon all Catalans, choosing to define the spontaneous "Castilianized" utterances

of the proletariat and lower classes as not sufficiently Catalan and thus outside of the authentic historical project of Catalanism (see section on “Role of writer and intellectual above” for evidence of this “pruning” of deviant varieties of Catalan).

What Rodoreda’s simple, uneducated prose rendering of spontaneous speech contributes to this implicit dialogue is a sly critique of the nationalist formula of “making art=making *pàtria*.” For, if language were, as nationalist ideology posits, the deepest expression of *Volkgeist*, then Cecília’s use of Catalan would make her, in theory, a paradigmatic member of the national community. But neither in the book is Cecília treated well by her respective nation, nor is Cecília’s “real-world” counterpart, the various dialects of the Catalan language in relation to the *correctors* or perhaps even Catalan in relation to Spanish (or “*cristiano*,” as it was known during Franco’s years). This is Rodoreda’s insinuation that, perhaps, “macrohistory,” written in the language of *Geist*, operates by excluding “minor characters” speaking minor languages in the interest of a purportedly universalist project, such as that of global democracy or the fraternal association of the nation. Thus, founding a political community based on the assumptions of a particular *Geist* must necessarily rely upon assigning the minor figures of “microhistory” a role outside of the goals or *telos* of the political community, negating their right to participation in “mutual dialogue” while implicitly reasserting the rights of a privileged elite (Viestenz, Bull 265). That is, the minor figures of history and their utterances that lack in nationalist authenticity, like Cecília, are used to delimit and define the orientation and *telos* of the political community, a community that excludes these minor figures while at the same time using them as an object by which the community defines itself. This exclusionary politics is explored further below.

Cecília's child-like voice, one that finds everything she encounters new and surprising, is a device which Christine Arkininstall also identifies with the tradition of the *flâneur*,<sup>22</sup> or "street-stroller," who defamiliarizes the city with a "newness" of vision that exposes the curiosities and contradictions of the *Geist* of macrohistory, such as the exclusion of the minor figures of history from a purportedly universal political community (Arkininstall 110). Cecília is a *flâneuse*, the *flâneur*'s female counterpart. But by assigning this archetypically male role to a woman, Rodoreda doubles down on the critical function of the artist as a seeing eye that penetrates the seaminess of the modern city, since often what is unperceived by the male artist is the result of the observer's gender. This reworking of a familiar trope is the *essence* of Bakhtin's dialogism, which refers not only to the language in which the work is written but also to the more abstract set of literary symbols from which the work draws. Seeing the *flâneuse* talk in the pages of *Camellia Street* to the *flâneur* is a clear example of the novel's dialogic qualities, as two literary symbols are given new meaning based on their proximity to one another in the text.

Additionally, the Bakhtinian collapse between the reader and the subject/narrator of the novel is completed in *Camellia Street* as in other fictions of Rodoreda, rendering the reader herself a *flâneuse*, in part, as we see Barcelona through Cecília's eyes. Compared to the epic poetry of Verdaguer, in which the speaker is telling an unquestionable truth monologically, Rodoreda's novel eliminates the emotional distance between reader and speaker, thus allowing for a critical empathy and a revindication of

---

<sup>22</sup> The *flâneur* being a continuation of a tradition created by Baudelaire, he too an avid borrower of literary tropes that he would then make sing to one another.

the humanity of the subaltern figure who is used to define the political community while simultaneously being excluded from it.

Rodoreda is in dialogue not only with language and literary form but also with symbolic languages that are written on the body. This dialogue in part dramatizes Rodoreda's (and other Catalan writers') search for an authentic language through which to express national identity, its ambiguities, and its self-fictionalizations. Elizabeth A. Scarlett has also observed that the body in Rodoreda's work functions as "a truthful text and consequent unweaver of social deception" (Scarlett 100). That is, truth as it is inscribed upon the bodies of its subjects both by morphological traits and by sartorial choices. This explains the novel's preoccupation with voyeurism, a recurring narrative device: Cecília watches and is watched by men who spy on her; she examines herself in the mirror and stares at others' abnormal traits. Scarlett suggests that this latter behavior is less a consequence of Cecília's narcissism but instead informed by "part of a larger quest that entails divining her family origins" (Scarlett 114). Rodoreda, here too, continues to dialogue with other forms of writing, such as the fairy tale and religious texts such as the Bible, given Cecília's status as a "foundling" with an inexplicable origin, a la Moses. So, although *Camellia Street* is in many ways "psychologically realist," according to Scarlett, its dialogue with these other forms serve to mythologize, dramatize, and even parody Rodoreda's contemporary social milieu, defamiliarizing and transforming it. Essentially, Cecília is a searcher, on a quest for bodily "signifiers that might connect her, in her eyes and the eyes of those around her, to a niche in the social hierarchy" (Scarlett 114). This is the *flâneuse* as detective. Just as the nation might be said to acquire a set of symbols and languages (such is the importance of the cultural reservoir that forms the

basis for a nation's "essential" identity) that define it and render it legible to others in a community in which the nation is the only politically viable form, Cecília desires to uncover and dominate a different microcosmic symbology, that of the body. What is more, Cecília's pursuit of the identification of her origins, reflecting the construction of a nationalist set of symbols by the cultural elite of a nation, is mirrored by Rodoreda's own search to locate the Catalan subaltern within greater hierarchies of domination, as I have shown above.

The problem, of course, is that Cecília only has a small degree of autonomy in terms of how her own body is read by others, being as she is a minor figure continually interpreted and reinterpreted within the exclusionary framework of a gendered macrohistory. From the beginning of the novel, Cecília as a child is assigned a role in the social hierarchy, as people comment that they'd "never seen a child with such pretty hands," for which reason she "must be a pianist's daughter" (Rodoreda, *Camellia Street* 10). Because of these ascriptions, Cecília begins to think of her parents as the source of an authentic identity that has been hidden or taken from her. The search for her biological parents' true identities preoccupies Cecília throughout the novel, but it is not until the final chapter that this mystery is left necessarily unresolved once and for all, shattering Cecília's hopes to understand the foundation of her own "authentic" personhood. That is, in a way opposite to the search for authentic "national" identity (constructed in nationalist terms), whose existence is predicated upon mythological origins that endow the nation with its legitimacy and immutable character (as in my discussion of *Volksgeist* and Verdaguer), Cecília realizes the impossibility of reconstructing an "authentic" identity, which fits nicely with Bakhtin's assertion that the novel as opposed to the epic does not

enshrine the origins of the nation or the national group whose speech is displayed in the novel. Cecília represents in a very literal way that all such speculation regarding the origins of a particular nation is either fictionalization (as evinced by those characters in the novel who speculate and thus fictionalize Cecília's own origins) or that the origins of a given nation are unknowable, the conclusion that Cecília arrives at for herself. It is ironic that this realization should come at the end of a novel throughout which Cecília's position in the social hierarchy is ascribed to her based on the existence of a visual language that is written on the body and which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The nation, as I have shown, requires the creation of subaltern groups or minor figures positioned outside of macrohistory, such that the feminine may be said to belong to this particular category, as women are denied the role of essential productive units within the bourgeois, macrohistorical economy and are denied access to public space. What is more, women unwittingly play the symbolic function of demarcating the macrohistorical concerns of the bourgeoisie from the microhistorical ephemera definitive of the lower classes. This is especially true in consideration of the workingwoman. In this analysis I follow Arkinstall, who suggests that a woman's presence in purportedly public space like the modern city and the perception of her presence change depending on a class-based script, evidenced in the "polarized class definitions of women pertaining to bourgeois lady and proletarian worker" (Arkinstall 121). For workingwomen are subjects that "demarcate an upper-middle class, whose notions of property and propriety preclude their women using their bodies for obvious commercial purposes, from a working class that depends for its survival on women as breadwinners" (Arkinstall 121). From the

connotation of contamination that the workingwoman carries comes the association with the prostitute, resulting in a “fluidity” between the two categories. It is perhaps what may be called the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, whose own definition of self determines that of the nation and its character, that the prostitute/workingwoman is a necessary entity both as a category within a bourgeois economy and as a productive unit of that economy itself but is still denied self-determination and inclusion in the political community.

Indeed, just as the nation is constructed through a porous collection of symbols and signs that limit and give to it contours, the workingwoman is incorporated into and defined by a fixed set of symbols that function as a language, giving the novel its dialogical character. Take, for example, Cecília’s profession: she is a prostitute of sorts, living in apartments belonging to her older, middle-class lovers, and “surviving unpalatable experiences with a series of lovers or ‘masters’” (Arkinstall 122). Since the functioning of the social environment in which Cecília lives depends upon her unambiguous adoption of the language of power, a language that ascribes to her a certain value as a prostitute, her laboral identity is written on her body and eventually even inscribed in her flesh. Describing her efforts in dressing the part of the kept-woman, Cecília tells us about buying a corset:

I’d never been able to wear a bra because my breasts were so small that when I raised my arm, even if the bra was very tight, it would ride up around my neck. But I had to do something if I was going to wear that pink dress I’d finally bought and which was so tight you could see everything.... I left it [the corset] on to sleep and got into bed thinking soon I’d be able to wear the pink dress....I woke up feeling like I was wearing a suit of armor....The corset had been squeezing me and I had to take it off like I was tearing off my skin because the zipper was stuck. When I ran my hands along my sides to soothe them, the skin felt so

bumpy that I looked in the mirror (Rodoreda, *Camellia* 108).

Here, we see that Cecília is literally made “a marked woman,” that the sign of her object-nature as a working and thus sullied woman is inflicted painfully onto her body in accord with the dictates of her time’s sartorial codes (Arkinstall 127). Cecília internalizes her office so much so that she ends up carving a cross, the mark of the prostitute, into her arm. This act of violence against the self’s body is a telling demonstration of not just the physical violence that inheres in the creation of a national space, delimited and maintained by the creation of a subaltern group that is outside of but defines the political community, but also the subaltern’s internalization of this fictional (by which I mean manufactured) and externally imposed identity.

Before this point of collapse between the external world of symbols and the internal thought processes of the protagonist (a characteristic of the novel mentioned by Lukács), however, Cecília is stripped of her subjectivity and becomes, effectively, an object belonging to a middle-class man named Marc, who keeps Cecília under observation in an apartment to ensure that nobody infringes upon his perceived property rights:

From that day on, whenever I got home I’d run to the blinds and always see that tailor staring, because he must have seen me go in [the apartment] and know I was peeking at him; they must have been trying to scare me (Rodoreda, *Camellia* 118).

Arkinstall uses the word “master” to describe Marc’s relationship to Cecília, which term is particularly apt, as Cecília is gradually stripped of all semblances of autonomy while living in Marc’s apartment. The story, up until these chapters lucidly and ingenuously



narrated, becomes fragmented and horrific in keeping faithful to the consequences of the psychological tortures that Marc inflicts upon Cecília, such as the daily rearrangement of various objects in the apartment. Effectively, Marc intends to rob Cecília of consciousness and thought, hoping to convert her into a passive, unthinking object incapable of disobeying his orders to stay put in the apartment all day. The tension continues mounting as Cecília is transferred from the hands of Marc to his friend “Eladi, a historian,” who keeps Cecília naked and in a perpetual drug-induced torpor:

Lots of nights he had to carry me to bed because I couldn’t walk and as soon as I put my feet on the floor everything started swaying and once I screamed because it seemed like the floor had caved in beneath me (Rodoreda, *Camellia* 128).

This chapter in Cecília’s story ends with Marc, Eladi, and the tailor beating and abandoning her by the docks, but not before dressing her with a “prostitute’s cross placed around her neck,” a reinscription and reassertion of Cecília’s object-status vis-a-vis the symbology of class and gender (Arkinstall 125).

The political readings of this are several. For one, as Arkinstall suggests, the themes of “surveillance and exploitation” that pervade the book seem to recall the harshest repressions of Franco’s dictatorship, as the repression of Cecília instantiates “the repression of dissident or ‘deviant’ citizens by a totalitarian state” (Arkinstall 125). One might also suggest, in view of the strongly class-influenced aspects of the narrative, that Cecília’s abuse at the hands of these male members of the Barcelona bourgeoisie nod to Rodoreda’s personal belief in the impossibility of building a Catalanism without a concomitant commitment to questions of gender and class. At any rate, the sly irony in the text with regard to Cecília’s treatment at the hands of her various lovers is made more

indelible dialogically, as “Cecília’s relationships with marginal male characters in the shantytown on Barcelona’s outskirts” are “characterized by a greater equality” than those between her and upper- and middle-class men (Arkinstall 125). Through the prismatic prostitute Cecília, we begin to see that the ideologies of state, nation, and religion, variously incarnated in Francoism, conservative Catalanism, and even elitist avant-gardism, all mask the abuse of a precarious subaltern group in the name of loftier or grander ideals.

Now may also be a useful moment to interject a reminder of my focus: the contradictions of a bourgeois conception of the nation, as discussed in the previous sections. *Camellia Street* is a novel that dramatizes Catalonia not in any objective sense but through the subjectivity of a person who must necessarily be included in the nation’s conception of itself but, strangely, is not included in the political community. Navajas expresses this paradox in the following: “La unidad nacional...debe proveer a todos los sujetos con un modelo de colectividad estructurado en torno a unas premisas uniformes para todos” (856).<sup>23</sup> This, obviously, does not fit with Cecília’s unease at walking the streets looking for clients, or even when she walks the streets for her own, non-economic purposes. The ideal of a liberal community of equals, certainly noble, is seen unrealized in *Camellia Street*.

Take as an example of the contradictions of the bourgeois conception of nation when Cecília accompanies her “master” Martí to the Liceu Opera. All her life, practically, Cecília has idealized the opera and the opulent Liceu, so much so that when

---

<sup>23</sup> “National unity...should provide to all subjects a model of collectivity that is structured around a set of universal premises for everyone.”—Translation mine.

Martí asks her what kind of gift she would like for being his kept woman she chooses the opera, probably the most universal symbol of the European bourgeoisie. But her excursion makes clearer her alienation from the collectivity. For one thing, Martí attends the opera with his wife, meaning he must hide Cecília's existence and deny his relationship to her. Consequently, Cecília's debut in the world of the middle-class is wholly provisional, as she is "admitida en el hogar colectivo como una huésped marginal a la que se escatiman los derechos de los demás, que se saben poseedores de las claves más poderosas del código social prevaleciente" (Navajas 857).<sup>24</sup>

Cecília's trip to the Opera does not end with her alienation from the viewing public, however, but also with the subject matter of the opera itself. Here again we see the principle of defamiliarization through Cecília's childlike, uneducated voice in effect:

The house lights were dimmed... There was a moment of silence, and suddenly, like they were coming from another world, some very sad trumpets blew. When the curtains parted, the stage was brightly lit and full of jolly people. Men bustled around. They sure didn't look handsome: they had ugly, skinny legs and wore balloony pants in two or three colors that stopped above their knees. A younger one with a goatee, chubby and full of himself, was sitting there telling them about something in song while the others almost died laughing (Rodoreda 165-6).

This almost surreal depiction of a typical opera, rendered farcical by Cecília's childlike narration, suggests the disjuncture between Cecília's psychology, influenced by her time, place, and station as part of the lower classes, and the aesthetic and moral values of the bourgeoisie and political elites that surround her. Who is at fault for this

---

<sup>24</sup> "...admitted to the collective home as a marginal guest who is denied the rights of the others [of the middle class], who know themselves to possess the most powerful keys to the prevailing social code."—Translation mine.

misunderstanding? The misunderstanding is mutual, as must be the blame, but this indicates to the reader that far from the fraternity of the bourgeois conception of the nation is reality, in which cultural symbols, such as dress and entertainment, serve to separate rather than conjoin possessors of a common language.

As is apparent, Rodoreda engages with her lived reality at the level of fiction, using language, thought to be the expression of an “authentic” national self, to question the viability of that same self. Rodoreda effectively implies that the universal, egalitarian principles upon which the nation is founded (in this case the Catalan but also perhaps the Spanish) do not always obtain in practice. Rather, as can be gleaned from Cecília’s interactions and relationships with various members of the lower and middle classes, the basic philosophy of a fraternity of equals possessing a common language that underpins the form of the nation is largely fantastical.

We can see in *Camellia Street* that Rodoreda certainly believes in the necessity of struggling against power that would threaten the “unisonance” of a specifically Catalan national voice. Take, for example, the state power that inheres in the “killing of Maria-Cinta’s dissident lover and the lengthy prison sentence handed down to Eusebi, of anarchist leanings,” two characters intimately related to Cecília, who is also subjected to “surveillance and exploitation” (Arkinstall 125). These acts of violence that are “symbolic of the repression of dissident or ‘deviant’ citizens by a totalitarian state,” as I have already observed, seem closer to a critique of the central, Francoist state rather than a Catalan nationalist ideology (Arkinstall 125). By telling her story in Catalan, a persecuted language whose tribulations Rodoreda’s Catalan-speaking protagonists mirror and channel, Rodoreda illumines what Navajas terms “lo minúsculo,” the people

seemingly forgotten by or outside of history. Nevertheless, through the dialogue of the various symbols presented in the nation depicted in *Camellia Street*, symbols such as the opera or the comparative sartorial codes of the prostitute versus the *flâneuse*, leaves the reader with the sense that an exclusionary nationalist ideology with hidden class-specific values cannot be justified given the purportedly unitary character of the nation. That is, as Rodoreda might have herself stated, Catalanism without a concomitant commitment to the rights of workers and women, the universal subaltern, would end up reproducing patterns of domination already present in the national space.

## Conclusion

Salvador Espriu, the most internationally lauded of twentieth century Catalan poets, moves within the same dualist literary-cum-political space as Mercè Rodoreda does, where he questions the motives and corollary exclusions of institutionalizing language according to nationalist sentiment and, at the same time, he criticizes the overt violence that inhered in Franco's Spain. Espriu's masterwork *La pell de brau* (*The Bull's Hide*), published in 1960, is a cycle of poems that present an anti-mythical<sup>25</sup> vision of the formation of Spain. Rather than treat the contemporary configuration of the Iberian Peninsula as a "calcefiad [*sic*] product" beyond change and criticism, the poet proffers an alternative vision of the Spain as *Sepharad* (the name the Sephardic Jews of Iberia gave to the peninsula before their exile), a political community defined by the dynamic process of its "activities and principles of action" (Viestenz, Bull 258). Espriu's work is anti-nationalist in this regard, as it criticizes *Sepharad* and its history (or, rather, prevailing interpretations of its history), "that unfolded bull-hide," employing Strabo's metaphor (mentioned in the introduction) of Spain as a stretched bull's hide (Espriu 4). In the second poem of the collection, the poet addresses his nation in the second person, lamenting its tendency to forget "all the spilled blood, / all the blood we will spill, bull-hide" (Espriu 4). In Viestenz's estimation, Espriu is putting in doubt the legitimacy of a nation (symbolic of Franco's Spain) whose sovereignty rests on the basis of violence against its own people, as evinced in the fifth of the poems: "You cannot crown whom

---

<sup>25</sup> I use "anti-mythical" in the sense of using the language and structure of myth for purposes that run counter to the political project of standard myths, such as those employed for nationalistic purposes. Perhaps "meta-myth" is a more appropriate term, given the self-conscious referentiality and allusiveness of Espriu's project, but the prefix "anti-" better connotes the political charge of *La pell de brau*.

you choose— / the blood-shedder, / the traitor, the rapist, / the thief, / or him who  
 never piled brick on slow brick / in a temple / of his own sweat. / The first thing fire  
 burns is freedom” (Espriu 7). The fire that burns “freedom,” in a way similar to Cecília’s  
 internalization of her vocation as prostitute, is buried within the poetic voice’s heart, “in  
 its terror, its fear” (Espriu 4).

But, as I indicated above, Espriu does not elide the importance of questioning the  
 verbal, mythical foundations of the political community. For this reason, Espriu’s work  
 comprises both a critique of Franco’s Spain, founded on violence, and an overly  
 nationalist vision of the potential self-determining state of Catalonia (though perhaps also  
 an appreciation for the inventiveness of its ideologues). In “Poem XXI,” the poetic  
 persona makes the bold, aphoristic claim that “Dreams will be converted, / bit by bit, into  
 reality,” a *précis* of the idea that myths found and authorize a particular reality. “Poem  
 VII,” exemplifying the simultaneous praise and skepticism of the Freudian cult of  
 ancestors that founds the nation, dramatizes the formation of “nationness”: “Long, long  
 ago / our grandfathers saw this same winter / sky, high and dismal, / and read it like a  
 wonderful sign / of protection and peace” (Espriu 9). The “wonderful sign” of winter  
 mirrors the human, spiritual qualities granted the Canigou mountain in Verdaguer’s work,  
 except Espriu recognizes the degree of interpretation involved in ascribing to natural  
 reality subjective characteristics. At the end of this poem, the descendants speak for  
 themselves, responding to critics who question whether Sepharad was ““best of the lands  
 you came upon””: we only say: ‘In our dreams, yes, it is’” (Espriu 10). The genius of  
 Espriu is in this recognition of the fictionality of the nation, the (pardon the neologism)  
 “notionness” of the nation. Despite this the poet ultimately suggests that as long as the

nation is being imagined it might as well have the character of a dream rather than the blood-drenched nightmare of Old Sepharad.

I dwell on Espriu's work at the end of this essay because of its resistance to facile categorization and the difficulty of imposing a single reading upon it. Unlike Verdaguer, Espriu creates and refutes myths at the same time, showing all political communities to rely upon fictionalizations or mythologizations of the same. Like (and unlike) Rodoreda, his mythopoetic vision of contemporary politics endears his work to broader "use." That is, where Rodoreda is specific in her critique of an urban bourgeoisie and its values that compose the founding principles of a larger political community that paradoxically denies certain of its members full access to its benefits, Espriu is allusive. His work, influenced by Greek, Egyptian, Roman, and Mesopotamian myth and poetry, motivates the search for a theory of the necessary fictionalizations of all political communities. But ultimately, like Rodoreda, he challenges totalizing interpretations of national identity and character, showing that through language and creation, abstract principles supposedly divorced from the real, in actuality condition and create our shared subjectivities and realities.

Where does this leave us? I have shown that through literary production, Catalonia and Spain both have engaged with the worldwide national project. Ultimately, I have demonstrated that the intertwined, inextricable concepts of language, culture, and art are malleable and shaped according to the values and desires of the creator. Literature and language offer us the ability to think through the assumptions and necessary repressions implicit in promoting a concrete political model like the national project. For this, any literary canon, the nation's soul written on the page, may indeed contain its



counter-image or the possibility of its own undoing. Reflections such as this (reflections that attempt to reconcile the seemingly distinct worlds of fiction and reality) are still necessary in view of contemporary politics.

One such contemporary issue upon which my analysis might shed light is that of the recent wave of immigration to Catalonia. Catalonia, “a country of immigrants,” has between 1998 and 2009 experienced an influx of immigrants, with the population of 7 million containing roughly 1,189,279 “foreign” persons (Cardús i Ros 37; Subirós). Though these persons have migrated to participate in the industrial economy of Catalonia, many work jobs below their skill levels and confront exclusion from the political community. Language acquisition plays a large part in the ability to determine oneself, with several immigrants who participated in a series of ethnographic interviews sponsored by the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona claiming that their perceived exclusion from the body politic was the result of their lack of knowledge of Catalan. This exclusion makes sense, as Catalan is naturally the language of power in Catalonia. However, certain testimonies suggest that there are economic and racial impediments to language acquisition. Mostafa S’haimi, for example, states that he “learned Catalan after 4 years” whereas a friend of his “was speaking it in 6 months” because he had a visa, could lawfully work, and was able to rent a flat (Subirós).

Integration into the nation also seems to be especially difficult if one is Muslim, given the high proportion of interviewees who felt “catalogued” or discriminated against on the basis of their belief. Obviously, then, there are structural and legal impediments toward “becoming Catalan” in the sense of acquiring the language and immersing oneself in the culture. Class, race, and religion, subjects we can find in a novel by Rodoreda, and

the possibility that these might deny one the opportunity to speak the language of the community, are thus other signs of identity that might effectively preclude one's integration in the fabric of the nation. It is through fiction, however, for its emphasis on language as a political tool, that we can understand how the linguistic mechanisms that produce national identity function in such a way as to simultaneously perpetuate these aforementioned structural barriers to entry in the community. For if the nation is written, who is being written out? Is it possible to write those outside in after the boundaries have been fixed?

## Works Cited

- Alvarez Junco, José. "The Nation-Building Process in Nineteenth-Century Spain." *Nationalism and the Nation in the Iberian Peninsula Competing and Conflicting Identities*. Oxford: Berg, 1997. 89-106. Print.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Arkininstall, Christine. *Gender, Class, and Nation: Mercè Rodoreda and the Subjects of Modernism*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2004. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M., and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: U of Texas, 1981. Print.
- Balcells, Albert, and Geoffrey J. Walker. *Catalan Nationalism: Past and Present*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Brennan, Timoth. "The Longing for National Form." *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 2015. 44-70. Print.
- Cardús i Ros, Salvador. "Reflections on the Bi-Cultural Experience, Immigration, and National Identity in Catalonia." *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, Jan. 2005, pp. 37-44.
- Casanova, Julián, and Carlos Gil Andrés. *Historia De España En El Siglo XX*. Barcelona: Ariel, 2016. Print.
- "Catalonia President Signs Independence Referendum Decree." *BBC News*. BBC, 27 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.

- Cornellà-Detrell, Jordi. *Literature as a Response to Cultural and Political Repression in Franco's Catalonia*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2011. Print.
- Crameri, Kathryn. *Language, the Novelist and National Identity in Post-Franco Catalonia*. Oxford: Legenda European Humanities Research Centre, U of Oxford, 2000. Print.
- Daly, Emma. "Outspoken Region Gives Prize to an Outspoken Critic." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 04 June 2002. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.
- Espriu, Salvador. *The Bull-hide = La Pell De Brau*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1977. Print.
- Etherington, John. "Nationalism, Nation and Territory: Jacint Verdaguer and the Catalan Renaixença." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33.10 (2010): 1814-832. Web.
- Hobsbawm, E. J., and T. O. Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983. Print.
- Hutchinson, John, and Anthony D. Smith. *Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.
- Lukacs, Gyorgy. *Theory of the Novel*. S.l.: Aakar, 2016. Print.
- Mar-Molinero, Clare, and Angel Smith. *Nationalism and the Nation in the Iberian Peninsula: Competing and Conflicting Identities*. Oxford: Berg, 1996. Print.
- Medrano, Juan Díez. *Divided Nations: Class, Politics, and Nationalism in the Basque Country and Catalonia*. Ithaca: Cornell U, 1995. Print.
- Mosterín, Jesús. "Columna | El Principio Del Fin." *EL PAÍS*. Síguenos En Síguenos En Twitter Síguenos En Facebook Síguenos En Twitter Síguenos En Instagram, 30 July 2010. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.

Navajas, Gonzalo. "La Microhistoria Y Cataluña En El Carrer De Les Camelies De

Mercè Rodoreda." *Hispania* 74.4 (1991): 848-59. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Douglas Smith. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A*

*Polemic: By Way of Clarification and Supplement to My Last Book, Beyond Good and Evil*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.

Pérez, Fernando J., and Pere Ríos. "1,8 Millones De Personas Votan Por La

Independencia Catalana En El 9-N." *EL PAÍS*. Síguenos En Síguenos En Twitter

Síguenos En Facebook Síguenos En Twitter Síguenos En Instagram, 10 Nov.

2014. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.

Reguant, Montserrat. *Etapas Reivindicativas De La Teoría Nacional Catalana:*

*Verdaguer, Oller Y Prat De La Riba*. New York: P. Lang, 1997. Print.

Rodoreda, Mercè. *Camellia Street*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf, 1996. Print.

Rosenthal, David. *Modern Catalan Poetry: An Anthology: Poems*. St. Paul: New Rivers,

1979. Print.

Salvat-Papasseit, Joan. "Joan Salvat-Papasseit." *Modern Catalan Poetry: A Critical*

*Introduction with Translations*. New York: City U of New York, 1977. 32+. Print.

Scarlett, Elizabeth A. *Under Construction ; the Body in Spanish Novels*. Charlottesville

(Va): U of Virginia, 1995. Print.

"Si Fuera Catalán, Me Gustaría Que Mi País Se Independizara De España." *20 Minutos*.

Edición España, 13 Feb. 2006. Web.

Smith, Angel. "Sardana, Zarzuela or Cake Walk? Nationalism and Internationalism in the

Discourse, Practice and Culture of the Early Twentieth-Century Barcelona Labour

Movement." *Nationalism and the Nation in the Iberian Peninsula Competing and Conflicting Identities*. Oxford: Berg, 1997. 171-90. Print.

Subirós, Pep. "Don't Ask Me Where I'm From: Thoughts of Immigrants to Catalonia on Social Integration and Cultural Capital." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (2011): n. pag. Web.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ Wa. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey, 1986. Print.

Verdaguer, Jacint, and Ronald Puppo. *Selected Poems of Jacint Verdaguer*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2007. Print.

Viestenz, William. "The Bull Also Rises: The Political Redemption of the Beast in La Pell De Brau by Salvador Espriu." *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* 42 (2016): 257-78. Print.

Viestenz, William. *By the Grace of God: Francoist Spain and the Sacred Roots of Political Imagination*. Toronto: U of Toronto, 2014. Print.

Viestenz, William. "Sins of the Flesh: Bullfighting as a Model of Power." *Iberian Modalities A Relational Approach to the Study of Culture in the Iberian Peninsula* (2013): 143-61. Web.